



O'Neil, Adams, Schwartz,
and the Remaking of
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The O'Neil Observer

No. 1, Summer '99

Dedicated to the art of Denny O'Neil and the craft of Comic Book Writing

The Dean on The King

Denny O'Neil
Discusses Jack
Kirby.

by Bob Brodsky

Like Jack Kirby, Denny O'Neil stands as one of comic's most important talents. While Kirby's best work relied mainly on the power of his artwork and the cosmic scope of his ideas, O'Neil has walked a different sort of beat. For nearly 35 years he has infused his writing with intelligence, craft, and groundbreaking characterization.

Originally a journalist, O'Neil began his comics' career at Marvel in 1965, writing Dr. Strange and the occasional Daredevil story for Stan Lee. In 1967 he joined Dick Giordano at Charlton, where, under the pen name "Sergius O'Shaughnessy," he contributed the well remembered, comic book novella "Children of Doom" and *Wander*, a marvelous science-fiction/western strip.

O'Neil came to DC with Giordano in late 1967 and promptly settled into an incredible six-year run that began with *The New Wonder Woman* in 1968 and ended with *The Shadow* in 1974. O'Neil's considerable creative accomplishments during this period included updating The Justice League and Superman, returning Batman to his "obsessed avenger" roots, and introducing "rel-



Splash page from *Justice, Inc.* #2. Art by Jack Kirby and Mike Royer, script by Denny O'Neil. © DC Comics 1999.

evance" to comics with his and Neal Adams' astonishing *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* series. In the process, he elevated comics to a new place of respect among fans, professionals and, incredibly enough, the "real world" outside the medium.

O'Neil left DC for a writer/editor position at Marvel in the late 1970s. At Marvel, he detailed Tony Stark's struggle with alcoholism in *Iron Man* and mentored a young Frank Miller before returning to DC in 1985. The late 1980s brought his gritty revival of Steve Ditko's 1960s Charlton character, *The Question*, a series O'Neil considers his most honest work to date.

Now group editor of the Batman line and the writer/creator of *Azrael*, O'Neil has also written extensively outside of comics including novels, teleplays and short stories.

(Jack Kirby possessed perhaps the greatest creative mind in comics' history. In addition to creating *Captain America* in 1941, Kirby and

partner Joe Simon are credited with launching an entire genre of comics with the release of *Young Romance* in 1947. Kirby's imaginative sense of perspective and depiction of dynamic movement delivered action like no one before or since. Few have realized the potential of comic books as he did.

Beginning with the *Fantastic Four* in 1961, Kirby's distinctive visual style and visionary spirit combined with the innovation and

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Inside: Englehart, Evanier, Maggin, News, Reviews, and More!!!

Who We Are and Why We're Here

Welcome to the first issue of *The O'Neil Observer*. We hope to give comic book fans a place to analyze, discuss and, of course, celebrate the work of Denny O'Neil.

Why Denny O'Neil? I'm glad you asked. In an industry where artists tend to get a lot more recognition, Denny's work stands as a testament to the power of great comic book writing. His early '70s work at DC, especially *Batman* and *Green Lantern/Green Arrow*, elevated comics to new, unprecedented levels of creativity and gave this reader much to enjoy, and ponder, in the process.

True, Denny's best work is intelligent and well-crafted, with tight narratives and rich characterizations, but there's also a 9th element in the mix that's harder to pin down. An elegance, really. Perhaps together we can draw some conclusions about this talented man and his craft.

I'm Bob Brodsky, a 40-year-old O'Neil fan. In the summer of 1997, I had the good fortune to interview Denny for an article that appeared in *Comic Book Marketplace* #56 titled "Denny O'Neil: Writer on the Storm!" While preparing the piece, my collaborator, Kevin Hanley, and I came to realize that our 8,500 words were really just the starting point for a long overdue appraisal of Denny's work.

Well here we are.

Our secondary motivation is to give more attention to comic book writers and the craft of comic book writing.

We believe that the guys who fill-in the word balloons warrant the kind of serious attention among fans that is the norm for their peers behind the drawing board. We'll be bringing many of Denny's fellow wordsmiths into our ongoing discussion by way of individual "spotlight" articles throughout this magazine.

Of course, we look forward to hearing from you!

Please send us your comments, articles, copies of O'Neil memorabilia, whatever. As you might suspect, we produce this magazine out-of-pocket, for creative, not financial, reward. Consequently, while we can't pay you for your contribution, any submission earns a free copy of our latest issue.

Please send your correspondence to:

The O'Neil Observer

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In closing, I'd like to thank John Morrow for his outstanding magazine, and inspiration, *The Jack Kirby Collector*. If we can do as well on our end as John and his staff have done on theirs, I will be very happy.

Bob Brodsky

Note: We have not yet established a regular schedule for publication of O'NO. Your feedback and creative contributions will go along way toward getting the Observer off the ground for good. Thanks. - asst. ed.

Tip O' the Hat

A big O'NO bear hug to Jan B. Cooke, Mark Evanier, John Morrow, and Gary and Lisa Carter for their friendship and support.

Thank you to all of our contributors and interviewees. We appreciate your help, guys.

Special thanks to Denny and Marifron O'Neil whose kindness, grace, and warmth are an inspiration.

Contributors

Shel Dorf - the founder of the San Diego ComicCon has been a fixture in West Coast fandom for almost 30 years, he also worked as a letterer for Milton Caniff on his *Steve Canyon* strip.

Gordon Hope-Murray - created the *Azrael: Agent of the Bat* web site in April of 1998. What started as a temporarily titled one-page job, has grown to a more than 200-page site featuring the most in-depth information available on the Azrael character.

Gary Usher - is an expert on Charlton Comics, who in 1997 self-published *Steve Skeates: Unmerciful Storyteller*, a detailed cataloging of Skeates' work.

The O'Neil Observer #1

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On the Cover:

A detail from Neal Adams cover for *Detective Comics* #395, *Batman* © DC Comics 1999.
Pat Boyette's cover for *Charlton Premiere* #2 "Children of Doom", © DC Comics 1999. The portrait of Denny was done by Neal Adams for a 1971 DC house ad.

Next Page: Neal Adams thumbnail for the beginning sequence of "Red Water Crimson Death" which appeared in *Brave and Bold* #93, © DC Comics 1999.

The O'Neil Observer

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O'Notes Spring/Summer '98

The recent bankruptcy of Denis Kitchen's Kitchen Sink Publications has shelved a planned team-up of the Batman and Will Eisner's Spirit. Denny had told us of the project at the Comic Con in San Diego last August, and he was VERY excited about the opportunity to write Eisner's character. Maybe after all the legal stuff is sorted out Denny will get his wish.

Denny recently contributed a short story to *Mob Magic*, a literary anthology published by DAW. Titled "St. Al," the piece is loosely based on encounters of 30 years ago when our man was living on the Lower East Side and had an affiliation with the *Catholic Worker*. We'll have a review next issue.

By the time you read this, the world of Batman will be deep into "No Man's Land." The ambitious saga has been running through all the regular Batman family titles (*Batman*, *Detective*, *Robin*, *Nightwing*, *The Batman Chronicles*, and *Azrael*) since summer 1998. The star of the story line is one of the greatest characters in the whole of the Batman mythos - Gotham City (We particularly loved Denny's description of Gotham in his novelization of the Knightfall story are - *Knightfall* published by Bantam 1994. No word yet on whether Denny plans to do a NML novel). Anyway, a devastating earthquake has hit Gotham and the federal government decides the cost to rebuild and protect it to be too great. Every bad guy and bad girl with an appetite for destruction has a field day at the expense of the few remaining citizens of poor ol' Gotham. Needless to say, the Batman doesn't abandon what was his birthplace and his home quite so easily. He and his friends are determined to reclaim the city.

Denny spoke about NML for an article that appeared in *Entertainment Weekly* #461 cover date 4 December, 1998. The article was written by *Entertainment Weekly* staff writer Jeff Jensen and contains a brief explanation of NML. Primarily the article discusses Batman as "...Time Warner's multibillion dollar Bat-business," with a mention of the new animated TV series *Batman Beyond*. Denny is quoted a couple of times in the article. He mentions that the whole DC line of comics will be relaunched in the year 2000. He is quoted, "In six months time, my staff and I will determine where we take the entire (Batman) franchise, from the visual look to the color of the logo to characterization of the minor characters." Pretty big stuff!! He is also very complimentary of the *Batman* animated series, specifically how the show "deliberately mixes time eras - the props are very 1930s but there's also computers - which gives it a timeless, mythic feel."

Speaking of the animated series, Denny wrote the liner notes for Columbia House's *Batman: The Animated Series* collection of videos. "...An interesting free lance gig," is how he described his participation to us. The tapes are available from Columbia House on a subscription basis. Each tape contains four episodes and do not appear to be in chronological order, but episodes are grouped by theme or character. For more info go to the website at www.columbiahouse.com.

Harper Entertainment recently published a large format paperback book on the animated *Batman* TV shows entitled *Batman Animated* (Harper Entertainment, published 1998). Besides lots of great art from the series, Paul Dini provides some text on the series, which primarily deals with how the show is put together. Denny is quoted as calling the series the best adaptation of the character outside of the comic books. In the back of the book is an episode guide listing the writer and director for the first 110 episodes, with a short one or two line capsule of the plot. Denny wrote two episodes based on his Ras Al Ghul stories (*Batman* #232 and #244). At least four other episodes are listed as adapted from Denny's comic book scripts including "A Vow from the Grave" (*Detective Comics* #410) and "The Jokers Five - Way Revenge" (*Batman* #251). There are also episodes adapted from Steve Englehart and Elliot S! Maggin's *Batman* work. The whole tone of the animated TV show really reflects the early '70s atmosphere of the *Batman* Denny helped define. Personally, the TV show is a gas and features a lot of good writing by some familiar names like O'Neil, Englehart, Maggin, Len Wein, Marv Wolfman, Martin Pasko, Steve Gerber, and the regular animated series guys Paul Dini, Alan Burnett and others. Check out the show and check out the book.

We would like to thank Denny and Marifran O'Neil for taking the time to have lunch with us at last year's San Diego ComicCon. They are as kind as they are interesting; we had a blast! And look who we bumped into in the restaurant!



Bof Jagat Romanian Foundation is a non-profit organization dedicated to helping Romanian orphans. Founded by the American parents of adopted Romanian children, our mission is to help those kids still "left behind" in Romanian orphanages. Every donation we receive, be it cash or urgently needed goods such as sleepers and medical supplies, goes directly to the children. Please send your donation or inquiry to Lee's dad, Bob Bradsky, at 8455 Fountain Avenue #611, West Hollywood, CA 90069.

...Writer on the Storm

by Bob Brodsky and Kevin Sanley

(The following is an excerpt from the beginning of Denny O'Neil: Writer on the Storm, which was originally published in Comic Book Marketplace #56, February 1998. We have reprinted it here for those of you who may not have read the original article and to provide some background on the roots of Denny's career in comics. You can contact Comic Book Marketplace on the web at www.comicbookmarketplace.com to obtain information on back issues or to subscribe. - Eds.)

O'Neil graduated from St. Louis University in 1961 with an English Literature major and minors in Creative Writing and Philosophy. He then served two-years in the Navy getting "some practical hands on journalistic experience and a lot of experience mopping floors." In a bit of history, he also participated in the blockade of Cuba during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962.

"I came out of the Navy, taught school for a year and decided that I wanted to write in some way," O'Neil remembers. O'Neil answered an ad for a beat reporter from a newspaper in Cape Girardeau - a Mississippi port town located near St. Louis. As a small town journalist, O'Neil would make a connection that would change his life.

"As a reporter I was on the road a lot - spending time in bus stations and drug stores - and I noticed comics were back. I suddenly realized that I hadn't seen these things in about 10 years so I bought some and found I really enjoyed them. I then did some rudimentary reporting and found that comics were in fact in the middle of a renaissance. I did two articles on 'The Return of Comic Books' and then Roy Thomas got in touch with me - his parents subscribed to the paper."

Thomas, then a teacher at Fox High School outside of St. Louis, had already accepted an offer to go to New York and be Mort Weisinger's assistant on DC's Superman Line of comic books. "So I did a third article - on Roy. I went over to his apartment on a Sunday afternoon and bored my girlfriend silly as I sat and talked with Roy. I was really turned on by the conversation and the chance to write the piece," O'Neil speaks with excitement - sounding like their conversation was last Tuesday, not in 1965. "About a month later I got a call from Roy asking if I would be interested in the Marvel Writer's Test. He had moved to New York, worked with Mort for about two weeks and then took a job with Stan Lee."

"So I got this Marvel Writer's Test, and 'why not?' - it was four pages of Fantastic Four without copy and it seemed like an amusing thing to do for 20 minutes. So I did it and I sent it to Roy and about a week after that a whole lot of things happened in one afternoon, the culmination of which was that I accepted an offer to come to New York and be Stan Lee's second assistant." O'Neil elaborates with laughter; "It was mostly too goofy a thing not to do. So I thought I'll certainly give this a year, I'll get some stories to tell and then I'll probably come back to what I considered to be my real profession which was small town journalism. I somehow never got back to that paper."

O'Neil worked as a Marvel staffer for six months before giving up a steady check for the star crossed life of a freelance writer. He wrote a couple of Patsy and Hedy and Millie The Model stories

before succeeding Stan Lee on Dr. Strange in *Strange Tales*.

"My assignment on Doc Strange came about because Marvel was in the process of exploding and Stan, who had written everything... couldn't keep up with it all. Roy was already kind of full up so neither of them, for whatever reason, wanted to do Doc Strange and I was the other warm body in the office."

"My job was pretty simple, I had to imitate Stan Lee," O'Neil says. "Success was judged by how indistinguishable my work was from his and I don't have one word of complaint about that now. Stan Lee's style was unique and it was what was making Marvel Comics happen."

"I think every young writer starting out with a new craft has to imitate somebody - whether consciously or unconsciously," says O'Neil. "Well for me it was all nicely spelled out - 'imitate Stan Lee.'"

"Which I did and of course there were things I might have done differently... but I'm very grateful for the fact that those first six months I knew what I was supposed to do and if I did it with reasonable competence I was successful. That's a much bigger break than most writers get starting out."

Stan Lee aside, O'Neil's brief Dr. Strange run in *Strange Tales* (#145 June 1966 to #149 October 1966) stands well on its own. Read them today and one can sense a new talent finding its way. Steve Ditko's atmospheric artwork loosened up and actually improved from Lee to O'Neil.

By mid 1967 O'Neil's Marvel output had dwindled to occasional odd jobs and the young writer found work at Charlton Comics using the colorful pen name "Sergius O'Shaughnessy."



This page: Dr. Strange cover by Steve Ditko for *Strange Tales* #146. © Marvel Entertainment 1999.
Previous Page: Stan Lee and Denny O'Neil at the 1996 San Diego ComicCon.

Captain America Stands Up to the '70s

Steve Englehart guides an American Icon through the era of Saigon and subcommittees.

by **Bob Brodsky**

Looking back on my adolescence in the early 1970s, I know that much of who I'll always be was frozen into place during that magical time. Most especially, the pop music and comic books of those years still resonate among the great influences of my life.

I remember lying in bed on a school night, the radio turned down low to great AM music like B.J. Thomas' "Rock and Roll Lullaby" and the Temptations' "Just My Imagination (Running Away With Me)." I would fade to sleep with the music in my head, and often, in that strange, wonderful place in-between, step into the song itself.

I suppose that I lived my own version of the *Wonder Years* staying overnight at my friend's house in 1971. On any given night that summer, Bob and I would lie in sleeping bags on the concrete floor of the skeleton frame of his parent's half-remodeled kitchen, with the stars above and the radio alongside.

And then there were comic books. I don't think that I can adequately convey the feeling of what it was like to, week after week, be greeted at the newsstand by books as fine as O'Neil and Adams' *Batman* and *Green Lantern/Green Arrow*, Lee and Kane's *Spider-Man*, Kirby's *Fourth World* trilogy, and Englehart and Buscema's *Captain America*.

In late 1972, a young writer named Steve Englehart inherited *Captain America*, a title that fans and professionals alike had washed their counter cultured hands of. From his very first issue (#153, September 1972, the start of the well-remembered "Phony Cap" series), Englehart infused the book with ambitious plots, superb narratives, and uncannily real dialog.

Englehart transformed Steve Rogers far beyond the range of any of the book's earlier writers. We felt Rogers' angst at being displaced out of his time and appreciated his dignified heroism.

Captain America helped me ease the sting of losing Oliver Queen after *Green Lantern/Green Arrow's* cancellation earlier that year. In fact, to me, Steve Rogers replaced Ollie Queen as the most human character in comics.

Englehart also expanded and deepened Cap's supporting cast, while the exciting twists and turns of his stories kept me counting those long 30 odd days until the next issue.

Whether Cap was fighting the Yellow Claw, or witnessing the death of his own American dream; his decency and heroism remained intact. Englehart's *Captain America* spoke, to paraphrase a line from a popular song of the day, "in a voice that came from you and me."

I hope that my conversation with Steve gives you the opportunity to discover, or rediscover, the great pleasure that his *Captain America* gave me not so long ago.



Cover to *Captain America* #155, the 1950s Cap story. © Marvel Entertainment 1999.

The son of a newspaper journalist, Englehart broke into comics as Neal Adams' art assistant in 1970. In 1971 he landed in the Marvel bullpen where he parlayed a fill-in writing assignment into a remarkable writing career. His comic book credits include memorable runs on *Dr. Strange*, *Batman*, and the *Avengers*. He is the creator and lead writer of the popular WGN series, *NightMan*.

This interview with Steve Englehart was conducted in May 1998.

O'NEIL OBSERVER: You certainly didn't wait a minute to rev up *Captain America*. From your first issue, you transformed a badly slumping title into something very special.

STEVE ENGLEHART: Well, I had seen the characters develop. In those days, the feeling that Marvel created for the reader was one of progression; characters were having lives that unfolded. I thought about that in terms of *Captain America*. A lot of other writers would come in under one theory of comics and say, "Well I'm gonna start writing this series, so everything starts now

with me. I will recreate the character the way I want it; I will do whatever I'd like. This is my run, this is what'll happen." I always felt that the characters had pre-existed me and would post-exist me. If I wanted my Captain America to be different from the Captain America that I inherited, I would take the Captain America that I inherited and then I would change him over time, visibly, into the guy that I wanted him to be. That's been my approach pretty much throughout. I like to move the characters. I like them to develop and show new facets of themselves, but I take them as given. If my *Avengers* is different from Roy Thomas', it's because I took Roy's version of the book and moved it over to mine.

O'NO: In 1972 you had just made the switch from artist to writer. How did you come to script two major titles, *Captain America* and *the Avengers*, within a few months of each other?

STEVE: Well, I wrote the Beast in *Amazing Adventures* and after a couple of months they said to me, "This is pretty good. Would you like to do *Captain America* and *the Avengers*, too?" I said, "Sure," and in the space of four months, went from not being a writer to writing five books for Marvel.

O'NO: *Captain America* and *the Avengers* were important books.

STEVE: The books were what you made of them. *Captain America* was just about to get cancelled when I took it over; it was really not selling. I was told that the only times it ever sold were the early 1940s, and the *Sleeper* series in *Tales of Suspense* in the late '60s. Other than that, nobody had been able to sell *Captain America*. So it was sort of any easy book to give to a young writer whose just starting out. It wasn't as if it was a top-flight title. Six months after I started writing it, it was. I believe in my characters and try to get inside their heads. When I took over *Captain America*, my approach was to say, "If this guy really existed? If he'd gone into that lab in 1941, lived through World War II and had been frozen, who would he really be living today in the 1970s?" I took the character exactly where Gerry Conway had left him.

O'NO: I don't think that either Conway or Gary Friedrich had any real ambition to move the book forward.

STEVE: Yeah, people were still looking for an answer as to how to do *Captain America* without being embarrassed about it. Everybody was going, "Oh, he's patriotic, and this is Vietnam time." I saw a way to do it, did it, and people really liked the result. The whole '50s *Captain America* thing just catapulted it out to a whole different realm.

O'NO: What kind of editorial support did you get from Roy Thomas?

STEVE: It was informal. The thing Roy said to me when he gave me *Captain America* was, "What I expect is you will write this book, it will be on time and it will sell. If you can do that, fine. If you can't do that, we'll fire you and get somebody who can, because we don't have any time to edit." I liked that because basically they throw me in the pool and said "Sink or swim," and it seemed perfectly fair to me that if I sank, I should get fired. But if I could swim, then I was encouraged to swim. Marvel was very encouraging and very supportive of taking things further, making the books better all the time.

O'NO: There's been a lot of discussion in fandom over the years about whether you or Roy originally conceived and plotted the "1950s Cap" series.

STEVE: It was Roy's idea. Roy said, "I've got this idea. It would be kind of cool to have a '50s right-wing guy... now you take it and run with it." So the plotting of it, the actual story, was mine, but the idea was his.

O'NO: Had the continuity problem inherent in the existence of a '50s Cap bothered you? Did you want to tidy things up?

STEVE: I think that was a Roy thing. He was also big on continuity, of course. And it may well have been my poring through a lot of those '50s *Captain America* stories and asking myself, "Okay, all this is true, what can I use from it? How can I build a story out of these facts?" It came from that. Being one of the first things that I did, I don't know whether I naturally did that, and given the opportunity I was able to express myself. Or whether, in doing all that research and putting it together, I kind of found something that I liked, and understood that I liked it for the first time. But in any event, in plotting all that and turning it into an actual story, I played with the continuity. I tried to make all that '50s stuff fit into the Marvel Universe. Like the '50s Cap being a teacher and so on.

O'NO: You did a masterful job. You cleared up a long unresolved point right out of the gate and did it with great style. You gave Cap a personality and made him more of a human being. This doesn't do him justice, but he became "a kinder, gentler" *Captain America*. Your writing was very warm, very personal. What I remember most about your run on the book is Cap's angst and humanness.

STEVE: Well, I liked him. I did not share his patriotic sensibilities in that sense. He wanted to volunteer for the Army, I didn't want to get anywhere near the Army, but I had had no choice myself. But I never condescended to him. I never said "I'm a liberal, this guy's some sort of '40s conservative. He wears a flag on his chest, what an idiot." I said, "Hey, here he is. Who is he? Who is this guy?" And I tried to express it.

O'NO: And you also built up such an impressive cast of characters. Harlem really provided a sense of community, with Lila, Sam, Sharon, Raff, and others moving in and out of the book. Your care in writing the series also showed in your excellent sense of plotting and pacing. You made me count those 30 days until the next issue many times! There was just so much going on and you hit on so many levels. It'd be one thing just to do the '50s Cap series and make it kind of out of sequence with the rest of the book, but you built on the title from that ambitious beginning.

Though you're a liberal, you never hit the reader over the head with your politics. Your *Captain America* was a very decent and heroic human being who was trying to come to terms with the strange realities of the present day.

STEVE: Here was this guy; he was a 1940s guy and he was living in the 1970s. To me, that was a major component of what the book was supposed to be about. Again, once you start saying, "Okay, he's real," then everything sort of flows out of that. I just tried to figure him out.

O'NO: I remember in your very first Cap story, the moving

speech that he gave to a misguided Nick Fury. "Frozen alive, Nick—frozen alive!" I didn't gain 20 years, buddy—I lost them! That was a real person talking.

STEVE: Again, I just tried to figure him out.

O'NO: But you seemed to do it so effortlessly, jumping into this major icon's head and making him relevant in personal terms to the reader.

STEVE: Well, it was effortless. That's what I could do. I couldn't really write Roy's *Avengers*, or Denny's *Green Lantern*, but I could write Englehart's *Captain America*. Twenty some years later, Englehart's *Captain America* is something in and of itself. But at the time, it was just Englehart writing *Captain America*.

O'NO: I disagree. I remember that even very early into your run, you weren't just another guy writing *Captain America*. You put so much care and craft into your work. One thing that really intrigued me, looking at some old letter pages; did you really plot "The Secret Empire" saga back in late '72? That struck me as being pretty incredible because, if so, you had a politician as the chief villain months before Watergate really took hold. STEVE: Yeah.

O'NO: How far ahead did you have *Captain America* worked out?

STEVE: There's no set answer to that. Quite often, I would just toss something up in the air with the idea it would come down later and I'd worry about it then. The ethos of the time was that with a few exceptions, like maybe Jim Steranko,

people generally took a series on for a long time. The idea of coming in and doing an arc and then leaving again is still very foreign to me. Because I want to see these guys develop over time, the idea of doing an arc on a series, you know, for three or six months doesn't interest me a whole lot because about issue three, I'm gonna feel like throwing something up in the air to come down later. And if there is no "later," then I don't feel that gets the full benefit of what it is I can do and what the book can do. But if you're doing a book over time, you can't do it every month ad hoc. It's a push-pull kind of thing. I'd sit down and I'd

go "I kinda see where I'd like to be in six months," and half-assedly, or whole-assedly, think up how I'm going to get there. But at the same time, I always liked it loose enough. I certainly wouldn't want to plot out the next six months and then just have to sit there and dialogue stuff that was getting steadily older in my mind. So yeah, I kind of worked out the Secret Empire thing, but certainly not in every detail as you saw it, because a lot of those details happened on the fly.

O'NO: When you brought in Peggy Carter, which I thought was just masterful, did you see her as being Betty Ross, The Golden Girl?

STEVE: No, I didn't think about that at all. I knew who Betty Ross, The Golden Girl, was, but that's about it. I probably read some *All-Winners*, but I'm not all that familiar with who she should be. It was just an attempt to link the generations again, to find somebody else who would have known Cap in a previous existence. And then there's the fact that she's the sister of the girl that he's in love with now. There were ways to play that.

O'NO: That was a great triangle. Was Dave Cox, the conscientious objector character, a surrogate for you?

STEVE: In a sense. I've got both my arms, but I wanted to do a heroic conscientious objector, because, "Why not?" Again, you weren't likely to see it anywhere else, and it wasn't that I was a heroic conscientious objector, but I was a conscientious objector, so I understood what that entailed. So I threw him in to kind of

speak to that point at least.

O'NO: Were you a Watergate buff?

STEVE: Oh yeah, I think that a lot of us were. I really saw the whole thing unfolding like a novel. When Nixon came on and said, "I'm sorry to say that Halderman and Ehrlichman, two fine public servants, have left, and by the way, I fired John Dean, too." Somehow, I looked at him in the eye on television and I said, "This guy is not only guilty, he knows they can prove it." And, so, I went through the entire Watergate thing convinced it



Englehart resolves the Nick Fury feud and gives an icon some soul, from *Captain America* #153. Art by Sal Buscema. © Marvel Entertainment 1999.

was going to end up the way it ended up. I mean, nothing ever surprised me. Things would happen, and I'd go, "Well, the Supreme Court might rule against him," and decide "No," because it's going to unfold and come to an ending like a novel and I know what that ending is. I'm not psychic, but that was just my opinion. So, I watched all that stuff and it was very riveting because it was all new at the time. Nothing like that had ever happened in the last 130 years since they tried to impeach Andrew Johnson. But yes, Watergate fascinated me and naturally it occurred to me that Captain America had to react to this. How could this be going on with Captain America ignoring it? So, we took this turn where Captain America decided to give up being Captain America; which was unheard of. I had a lot of fun with that. Everybody sort of assumed, "Oh yeah, he'll be gone for an issue, or two issues, or maybe four issues," but he was gone for a long time. And to be doing the book month after month without him was a challenge and I loved every minute of it. It was "How long can I keep this going without Captain America in it?" And that led to Nomad and Roscoe and all that stuff which, again, went where no comic had ever gone before. That's where you go try something. That, again, was total Marvel in those days. "Just go for it."

O'NO: Would you have liked to have kept Nomad on permanently?

STEVE: No, Nomad was only there because I had thought long and hard about who Steve Rogers would be if he weren't Captain America. Little did I know that they'd bring him back, give other people the name and then do books about him. I give my girlfriend at the time credit, because she came up with the name. I kind of knew who he was, you know, "man without a country," etc., but she came up with the name. I always felt that Steve Rogers might become Nomad for a time, but in his soul he was still Captain America. I could not imagine Steve Rogers being the Nomad for the rest of his life. It would have taken something as dramatic as the Red Skull returning, or whatever, to get him to come around, but I think that in his heart of hearts he wanted it all to work out somehow so he could be Captain America.

O'NO: That's exactly the way that I felt as a reader.

STEVE: I didn't spell this out, but it was kind of a war between the side of Steve that wanted to be Captain America and the side of him that understood what Captain America was supposed to be and knew that he couldn't be it during that period. It was fascinating.

O'NO: It was great and really the first super hero deconstruction. Did you catch any heat over Peggy and Gabe's interracial affair?

STEVE: No. Ten years later when I did *Coyote*, I gave him two girlfriends, one white and one black, and I was astounded to find out that there were parts of the South where it was not distributed. Where the distributors just wouldn't distribute that book. That was amazing to me. And, it goes to show the fact that up until that point I was unaware that such things could happen. I have no knowledge one way or the other, certainly nobody ever came to me and said, "They're not carrying *Captain America* in Alabama because of this," so I never felt any heat. Hopefully, there wasn't any. *Coyote* was a more in-your-face book than *Captain America* was.

ONO: It was a quiet, nice little sub-plot. I liked their relationship.

STEVE: Well, I'm a liberal, but to me people are people. It makes no difference to me if they're black, gay, or whatever; people relate people to people. Gabe and Peggy had come from the same era and had been through a lot of the same experiences. And they liked each other. That was enough for me.

O'NO: I thought it worked really well. Cap had been psyching himself for a confrontation with Peggy that never came.

STEVE: Yeah, it was a great soap opera.

O'NO: Moving on to Cap's artists; would you please comment on Sal Buscema and Frank Robbins?

STEVE: Well, Sal was great, a writer's dream. I consider both Sal and Joe Staton, who I worked with on *Green Lantern*, to be equivalent. They both can really tell stories and they're both considered not first rank guys by your basic fan. But Joe and Sal are *fabulous* storytellers, and they would convey the emotions of the characters and every nuance that I had in mind. *Captain America* didn't look like John Buscema and Tom Palmer, but I could not have been happier than with Sal Buscema. It was a shock when we switched to Frank Robbins, because although I loved Frank Robbins for who he was, it was difficult losing Sal after we had done so well together. Frank was a great storyteller, but he wasn't as good as Sal. He was very good in many, many ways, but there were some nuances lost. Part of that was the fact that he was just coming on to the character. Although I don't think that the book suffered unduly, it would have been nicer to have had Sal all the way through that run.

O'NO: Yes, I thought he well conveyed your unique, gentler take on *Captain America*. I don't think that Jack Kirby could have drawn your version of the book.

STEVE: I'm a big fan of Jack's, but he had a very different point of view when he co-created *Captain America* with Joe Simon in the '40s. And I know that when I left *Captain America* and he took it over, he was quoted as saying, "My *Captain America* would never have had any crisis." And I have to say that I think most people at that point were happier with my *Captain America* than with his.

O'NO: That's an understatement.

STEVE: Jack was a wonderful guy. He had great concepts and great art, but he couldn't write dialogue for beans. And so all of the characterization of the characters just went by the board when he took over. Which was too bad, because Kirby was great and he shouldn't have been writing his own stuff. There should have been somebody else writing it and then it would have been a whole different kettle of fish.

O'NO: Why did you leave *Captain America*?

STEVE: Well that was my decision. At that point, having done about four years of it, I just thought, "I can leave *Captain America*. There are other books I want to do." So I left and went on from there.

O'NO: Weren't you originally going to just take a leave of absence? John Warner was going to do the book for awhile and then you were going to come back?

STEVE: No, though they might have said so.

ONO: You were actually off the book six issues before Jack came on.

STEVE: I was actually supposed to leave the issue before I did, and then John came and he said, "Well this whole thing about the history of the Falcon; there's no way that I can dialogue this. This is so much a part of your history, would you write those pages?" I had plotted it, he was going to dialogue it, but then I did those 10 pages in the middle of the book. But theoretically, I was done the issue before. In any event, I was done after that and I turned my attention elsewhere. I don't know what happened there, because it was a very smooth hand-off on my part. I told everybody, "I'm leaving, I'll take it down to here." They had plenty of time to setup what was going to happen. But, John Warner was new and I guess that maybe he had trouble meeting the deadlines, or whatever.

O'NO: What would you have done for the Bicentennial, had you continued with *Captain America*?

STEVE: I have no idea. I stopped thinking about it. I got there and said, "Here's a good place to stop." So, I turned my attention to *Thor*, or whatever it was that I went off to do.

O'NO: Did the Falcon work for you?

STEVE: Yeah, I liked the Falcon and had a great time with him. I would say that probably that whole thing where I told you the real origin of the Falcon was probably sort of me gone berserk. That was one of the signs that I had just run out of things to do there, because I liked him as he was. Putting him under the control of the Red Skull sort of worked, but at the same time, I'm not sure that it improved him any.

O'NO: It was a heavy shock for the reader because we thought we knew the character.

STEVE: Well, I liked that part of it, where he's been this guy we knew for six, seven years, then all of a sudden... But, I'm not sure "Snap" Wilson was the thing to do to that guy.

O'NO: The last thing on Cap, Steve. *Captain America* #175, which to my mind is one of the most important and outrageous comic books ever. That's the one where the commander-in-chief blows his brains out in the executive office. Did you have to deal with the suits upstairs on that story? You've talked about having artistic freedom at Marvel. Did they draw the line on that one?

STEVE: No.

O'NO: Nixon was still president when that was published.

STEVE: Right. As I recall, I didn't challenge them. I think that I got to that point and said, "I can't... If I say that it's Nixon, I might run into trouble." So, I just kept it all off-panel. It was self-censorship. If I had done Nixon, I don't know whether I would have run into problems. I just assumed it was better to keep a low profile for something like that. And, again, you know, these days, the entire Republican party is spending every waking minute denigrating the President. But things were different in those days. So, I certainly was aware of, I don't want to say the gravity of it, because again, it was only a comic book, and I wasn't going to bring down the republic, but it wasn't nearly as

easy then to kind of trash the president and walk away from it. And, yet, I was very clear that the president had trashed himself, and deserved this sort of fate. So, I just decided to do it off-panel.

O'NO: Why do you think that your version of *Captain America* was such an artistic and commercial success?

STEVE: Again, somehow I had the affinity for doing that, or the ability. Thank my dad's genes or whatever, I just did it. ●

(Additional portions of this conversation appeared in *Comic Book Artist* #2, Summer 1998. To obtain a copy or to inquire about other issues of CBA (a fine, fine publication), contact Jon B. Cooke at www.fantasy.com/comicbookartist-asst.Ed.)

Green Lantern/Green Arrow "Peacemakers"

Legends of the DC Universe #7-9, Aug - Oct 1998

Script: Dennis O'Neil

Pencils: Greg Land

Inks: Dick Giordano

Reviewed by Bob Brodsky

During our 1997 Comic Book Marketplace interview, Denny told me that he had recently completed a three-part revival of Green Lantern & Green Arrow slated for *Legends of the DC Universe* in 1998. The project would detail how the duo met during a South Asian conflict similar to Vietnam.

Though I was a bit disheartened by Neal Adams's absence from the project, the opportunity to revisit my all-time favorite comic book kept my anticipation high.

Unfortunately, the finished work has let me down.

Now I'm not a slave to continuity, and I realize that DC's mid '80s *Crisis on Infinite Earths* series opened up new paths for all their characters, but much of the heart, passion and humanity of the original early 1970s series has been lost.

At the dawn of their respective careers, Hal and Ollie rendezvous in Minglia, a South East Asian country engulfed in civil war. Hal has come to test fly a fighter plane purchased from Ferris Aircraft by the Minglian army, while Ollie is investigating the opposing rebels' theft of weapons manufactured by his company, Queen Industries.



Cover of *Legends of the DC Universe* #7, part one of "Peacemakers", art by Hugh Fleming. © DC Comics 1999.

Yes, weapons. In a bit of post-Crisis continuity, Ollie is a munitions manufacturer and not the Chairman of the Queen Fund. I can understand moving Ollie out of finance, but his being behind weapons of mass destruction is a bit much for me. The beardless Ollie Queen we first meet is a brash, young playboy whose decision to fight crime as Green Arrow seems to have been dictated more by his testosterone level than any desire to avenge injustice. Fortunately, Ollie the man does grow during the course of the story.

As in the original series, Hal's trust in an authoritarian figure lands him on the wrong side of the conflict. In the service of a General Zho, a corrupt army officer who has a financial interest in continuing the government's war against the rebel "Lei Kung," Hal, still coming to terms with the power he holds as Green Lantern, seems to find comfort and clarity in his Guardians of the Universe assigned mission of providing order on the earth. He is little changed by the story's conclusion.

Though the series' plot is somewhat pedestrian, "Peacemakers" is a fine example of basic comic book writing. You can bounce a dime off of Denny's well-crafted script, while the story features a tight narrative and excellent dialog.

Denny's visual sense is keen throughout the series. For example, in chapter two a tight shot of a thoughtful Green Lantern in space segues nicely into a close-up of an injured Green Arrow writhing with pain in the rebel camp. In the following panel, a terse scene-setting caption over an aerial view of the rain-soaked camp nicely concludes the transition.

My main problem with this series is that, quite simply, these current versions of Hal and Ollie are hollowed out re-workings of the characters so beautifully presented in the original series.

Sure, the first Green Lantern/Green Arrow series had its share of hokey plots and stretched like hell to serve the liberal social agenda of the day. But to my mind, those stories were ultimately less about relevance and more about Hal and Ollie, two quite real people who just happened to be comic book characters. Over the run of the original series the duo's roles just about reversed as Hal gradually grew more flexible and confident, while Ollie fell away into anguish and self-doubt. It wasn't just Speedy becoming a junkie, though Iord knows that alone was pretty damn exciting, but how Ollie reacted to the news that made the original series work.

During Chapter Two of "Peacemakers" a wounded Ollie is captured by the Lei Kung and meets Sister Angelina, a beautiful young nun who works among the rebels. While tending to Ollie, Angelina explains to him that the rebels are really misunderstood victims of war profiteers who simply want to be left alone.

Ollie is unconvinced until, during an army attack, Angie is killed by a Queen Industries' land mine. The man who in the original series gave up his identity and checked himself into a monastery over his accidental killing of a criminal has seven whole panels of pain and sorrow before jumping into the fray on the side of you know who. Ollie never mentions Angie again. The story gives no room for her death to have any real impact on the Emerald Archer.

With the debut of his beard in Chapter Two, Ollie becomes less the kid and more the rambunctious, and entertaining,

character we all well remember.

Still, this guy is really "Ollie Light:" a flash of gusto, with little of the classic original's flavor and depth.

Hal, on the other hand, never quite shakes off a certain smugness that makes him unsympathetic from the get go. He reminds me of Frank Miller's version of Superman in *Dark Knight*: a guy who's too powerful to be smart and is easily duped by small men who represent authority.

In Chapter One, Denny makes a tactical error that also reflects poorly of Hal. After Ollie's capture, General Zho assures Hal that Ollie was killed and, even though he saw a man with a bow and arrow the previous night, Hal believes him. He actually leaves the country *without making any attempt to find Ollie*.

Chapter Three is by far the best of the series. Hal and Ollie both seem truer to their estab-

lished characters and Denny's dialogue between them is sharp and smart.

While Greg Land's pencils are adequate in a 1990s Dick Dillin sort of way, and it's nice to see Dick Giordano back on inks, their finished artwork is quite bland. If not Adams, then how about Miller, Kaluta or Simonson? A memorable Green Lantern and Green Arrow requires the edge that such an artist brings.

Come to think of it, I'm sure Denny could have presented a much more potent Lantern/Arrow revival outside of the "regular" DC super hero universe. With all the possibilities in DC's fine Vertigo series, it's a shame that this Green Lantern/Green Arrow is ultimately a mainstream comic, with mainstream limitations.

I hope that Denny gets another shot at Green Lantern/Green Arrow. We all know what he's capable of doing under the proper circumstances. ●

Legend of the DCU

GREEN LANTERN/GREEN ARROW "Opp. Ollie"

TITLE: Call to Arms

TWO PANEL SLASH: THE MASH SHOT IS OF A ROCKET WITH
CENTRAL COMING UP FROM THE GROUND HEARING FOR A FEW
FIGHTER-BOMBER. (DOWN FACE THIS-WE DON'T WANT A REAL
IDENTIFIABLE PLANE HERE. PUT SOMETHING THAT LOOKS REAL.)
WE'RE ABOVE AN ASIAN JUNGLE, BUT MAYBE WE DON'T HAVE TO
SEE THAT YET.

CAPTION: Suddenly, the little bomber sky is covered with a screen of redness
and the sound of a rocket engine fills the forest air.

2. INSERT LAY LOWERS TO GIVE TIGHT ON HAL, JORDANO IN PILOT-GEAR
REACTING TO DANGER.

CAPTION: Hal looks pleased at his pilot's voice and then to the side of the
fighter's voice.

CAPTION: Happy as ever at such love.

CAPTION: He knows that every day is only a small victory.

CAPTION: He knows himself to be one of the great men of Earth.

CAPTION: That belief is about to be tested.

EDITORIAL, TEAM: PLEASE ADD CREDITS AS APPROPRIATE.

SPECIAL: some endearing plot is also

Wright: we are the sons of violence,

all down this deeper than.

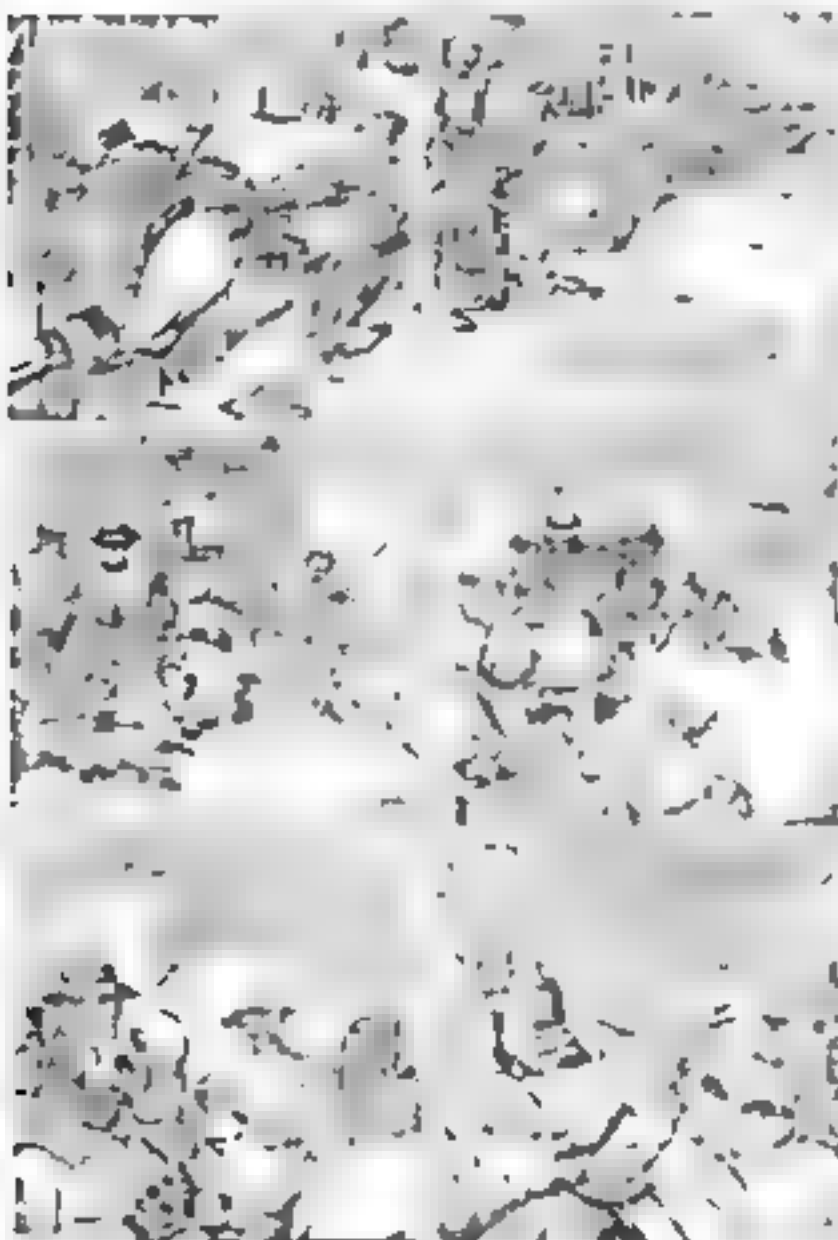
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premier issue of Stan Lee to launch the most expanding Marvel Age of Comics. Throughout the '60s Kirby and Lee continued to create lore. As the decade progressed, Kirby's comics began to venture deep into mythology and European folk tales, expanding the scope of comics as a result.

As the '70s dawned, Kirby became estranged from the situation at Marvel and made, what was at the time, the unthinkable leap to the "Distinguished Competition." It was while at DC that the full wonder of his genius was revealed. His "Fourth World" was not quite the anything else that had come before it. It was a new series: New Gods, Mister Miracle, and The Forever People, as well as the long suffering Superman's Pal, Jimmy Olsen. Kirby's grandest creation was a breathtaking blend of science fiction and mythology. Jack Kirby had created an entirely new universe.

The cancellation of *New Gods* and *The Forever People* in 1972 reportedly pulled the plug on Jack's Fourth World all too soon.



Two pages from pages 4 and 5. Kirby depicts the Red Hood Dragon being the Fighter #3. © DC Comics 1999

Although greatly disappointed by the cancellations, Kirby went on to create *The Demon* and *Kamandi*. To fulfill his contractual obligation at DC, he also worked on other existing titles. He would eventually return to Marvel in late 1975. *mat. Ed.,*

In 1975 Denny O'Neil's scripts and Jack Kirby's art came together briefly on *Richard Dragon*, *Kung Fu Fighter*, and *Justice, Inc.* While not widely acclaimed, the pairing of two comic book legends is worthy of discussion.

Denny talked to us about Jack last November in this minute installment of *Benny Street*.

THE O'NEIL OBSERVER: When did you first become aware of Jack and his work?

DENNY O'NEIL: Probably before I became a professional. I started buying some Marvel comics when I was still a reporter and I imagine that there had to be some Jack Kirby in there. And actually, if you want to tell the strict truth, probably when I was 6 or 7, because I remember reading *Captain America* and being struck by the artwork, couldn't even articulate that I liked it. Just remember that there was something different about it. "Dynamic" is the word I would use now—probably didn't know that word when I was 7. But remember, while *Captain America* wasn't one of my big favorites, it was a book I enjoyed. You know, 7-years-old in the Midwest, it doesn't occur to you that human beings had done this (laughter), that there might be names attached to it. And then of course when I went to work for Stan, Jack was one of the very first people I met. I remember watching him work in the office and being so new to the business that I didn't know how astonishing it was that that guy was sitting there, and that as fast as his hand could move, pictures were emerging (laughter).

O'NEIL: How well did you get to know Jack during your mid '60s stay at Marvel?

DENNY: Oh, just to say hello to. I don't think we ever spent an evening together as I did with Bill Everett and one or two other people. Jack would come in and if I was in the office or around, I'd see him and say "Hi," but there was no significant interaction.

O'NEIL: Do you recall the reaction at DC when it was first learned that Jack would be coming over from Marvel?

DENNY: Oh yeah, sure. There was rejoicing. I think that people thought it was a coup.

O'NEIL: How did you feel about Jack joining DC?

DENNY: Well I certainly was approving of it. By that time I knew enough about the business to know how good Jack was (laughter), and I thought his addition to the line would only mean good things.

O'NEIL: I've heard stories over the years that Carmine's hiring of Jack was in fact an attempt to "Marvelize" DC by extending Jack's Fourth World as a running subplot across most of the DC line. Supposedly, Carmine's

plan was never fully implemented because of resistance from some of his editors. Do you recall such a plan?

DENNY: No, but Carmine would not have confided in me. That would make some sense. I don't know if it's true or not. I mean Marvel was clobbering DC in sales by that time and I imagine that a lot of Marvel's success was rightfully credited to Jack. So you know, it's a kind of time honored ploy to hire your competitor's big gun, and I think Stan would have been out of the question (laughter). Again, "resistance from editors?" It's not an impossible scenario, but I don't know.

O'NO: How did you and Julie Schwartz come to employ the Morgan Edge, "man behind the mirror" sub-plot in your *Superman* stories? Did you and Jack communicate on this?

DENNY: No. It was something that Julie asked me to do.

O'NO: I thought that perhaps the Edge subplot was an early attempt at Carmine's alleged plan.

DENNY: It could be. But I was so far down on the totem pole, and I wasn't there very much. I would walk, bicycle, or subway up once or twice a week and do my business and maybe hang around and go to dinner with somebody, maybe not. But it was a pretty closed shop in that I don't think a lot of information was even shared with the editors. I don't think they got sales figures, for example, which I consider an essential tool for an editor to have. So I don't know. I suspect that only Carmine could answer those questions, and maybe not Carmine. Or maybe Joe Orlando would have known.

O'NO: Were you a fan of Jack's Fourth World?

DENNY: I thought it was interesting. It's like so many things. I now appreciate it more than I did at the time. Now have, I think, a pretty clear idea of what he was up to which was nothing less than creating a new mythology from the ground up, and that's pretty ambitious (laughter). But at the time I just thought they were interesting superhero comics.

O'NO: Did you have a favorite book in the series?

DENNY: I don't think so. I liked them all kind of equally. Maybe *Mr. Miracle*, by a tiny hair.

O'NO: In late 1972 a fanzine called *Rocket's Blast Comic Collector* printed an erroneous item stating that Jack had left DC to return to Marvel, and that you were going to replace him as editor of *Mister Miracle*, *Kamandi* and *The Demon*. What do you know of this story?

DENNY: (Laughter) Boy that's interesting. I think I wrote a *Kamandi* or brushed up against that character. In 1972 it was not likely that they would have considered me for that. I don't remember if that was the year that I actually spent, I think, not quite a year on the payroll. But the year I did spend on the payroll, I would not have won any popularity contests. I sure think if I had been in their position, I wouldn't have considered me for such a thing and I am willing to testify that nobody ever mentioned it to me. So I kind of suspect that's one of those rumors that started in the ether somewhere.

O'NO: In 1975, as Jack's DC contract was winding down, you and he produced what I believe was your only work together—

three issues of *Justice Inc.* and one of *Richard Dragon, Kung-Fu Fighter*. Both of those short-lived titles were written and edited by you. How did Jack become involved with the books?

DENNY: I think that Carmine probably just gave him the assignment or asked him to do it. I don't remember specifically asking for Jack. I do remember being delighted with the results and happy that he was doing them. Particularly with *Justice Inc.*, I thought he did a pretty good job there. With the other title, I don't know that he had that much interest in that kind of material. And I didn't have a handle on what it should be visually so I think, as so often happens in the writer/editor equation, the editor half of that got pretty much slighted and I just concentrated on doing my scripts. But there was minimal interaction if any. Like so many things, I did a script, it got sent off to an artist and, the artist being Jack, within two or three weeks I got the job back and I never needed any editing.

O'NO: Did you send Jack a complete script or did you work "Marvel Style?"

DENNY: I would have sent a complete script for those. But some of them I think were adapted or quasi-adapted from the novels.

O'NO: Do you recall talking on the telephone or exchanging notes with Jack about the books?

DENNY: Well, we may have but, again, not significantly. It would have been just business, not creative talk. I would imagine that Jack was much more interested in doing his own stuff than my script off of characters that were created by somebody else. It's like three removes from the creative source, and Jack was, we now know, one of the most imaginative and creative guys that the field has ever had.

O'NO: It's always struck me as odd that DC did not acknowledge Jack's participation on those books. Did the powers that be at the company ask you to downplay Jack's role?

DENNY: Not that I remember. No. "Never attribute to malice what can be explained by incompetence (laughter)." I think you'd have to remember that for all of us it was a job. And while you may have recognized that Jack was way better than the average penciler, we were basically guys doing a job. And there was no cult of personality. There was not anywhere near the emphasis on individual creative contributions that there is now. I'm not lauding that or excusing it, it's just the way it was. Similarly there was the big fuss, generated I think by Frank Miller about Superman's head being redrawn in the *Jirasy Olsen* book and what an artistic outrage that was.

O'NO: Right. And Mark Evanier also.

DENNY: Yeah, it was an artistic outrage. But I'll bet Jack didn't think so, though he certainly didn't like it. But the attitude was different. Nobody was thinking very much in terms of art form, or at least if they were, they weren't admitting it (laughter). When Frank and Mark said, you know, "It's treating it like product." Yeah, exactly. For all practical purposes that's the way the stuff was treated. And nobody was being malicious. It was simply not quite recognized as an art form or anything that consisted of individual creative contributions. It was beginning to be, but that kind of information sort of disseminates slowly. So I think, at the bottom of the food chain, that recognition was pretty universal.

maybe not so much at the top, but the people at the top had no reason to think of it like that. When comics started in 1939 it was a pretty low rent form. I guess you know Bob Kane died a couple of days ago. Somebody was talking about him today. About how he apparently was interested in newspaper strips. Because that was the respectable form of comics back then. Comic books were definitely a stepchild. Again, probably there were individual creators who were thinking in terms of an art form, but they probably wouldn't voice that aloud.

O'NO: I just saw a contradiction, because when Jack came over to DC, "Kirby's Here!" was every where, but by 1975 he couldn't get arrested as far as the company was concerned.

DENNY: Well, they may have recognized that the fans were interested in Kirby. Whether the people running the company recognized it, I don't know. Again, I was so far down on the food chain, I never had any interaction with any of the people who ran things, so you may be right. At the very least, of course, they would have seen some value in his name. How much respect for what he did that carried, I don't know. You'd think that Carmine would know, because he was in the same racket and he certainly knew good from bad. And I seem to remember him praising Kirby a lot. I really don't know.

O'NO: How do you rate your four stories with Jack?

DENNY: I've not re-read them; maybe I ought to. They were probably okay.

O'NO: I thought that while they were not among either of your best work, your styles bounced off each other very well, and Jack's pencils gave the stories extra excitement. Especially with *Justice Inc.*, where you had three straight issues together.

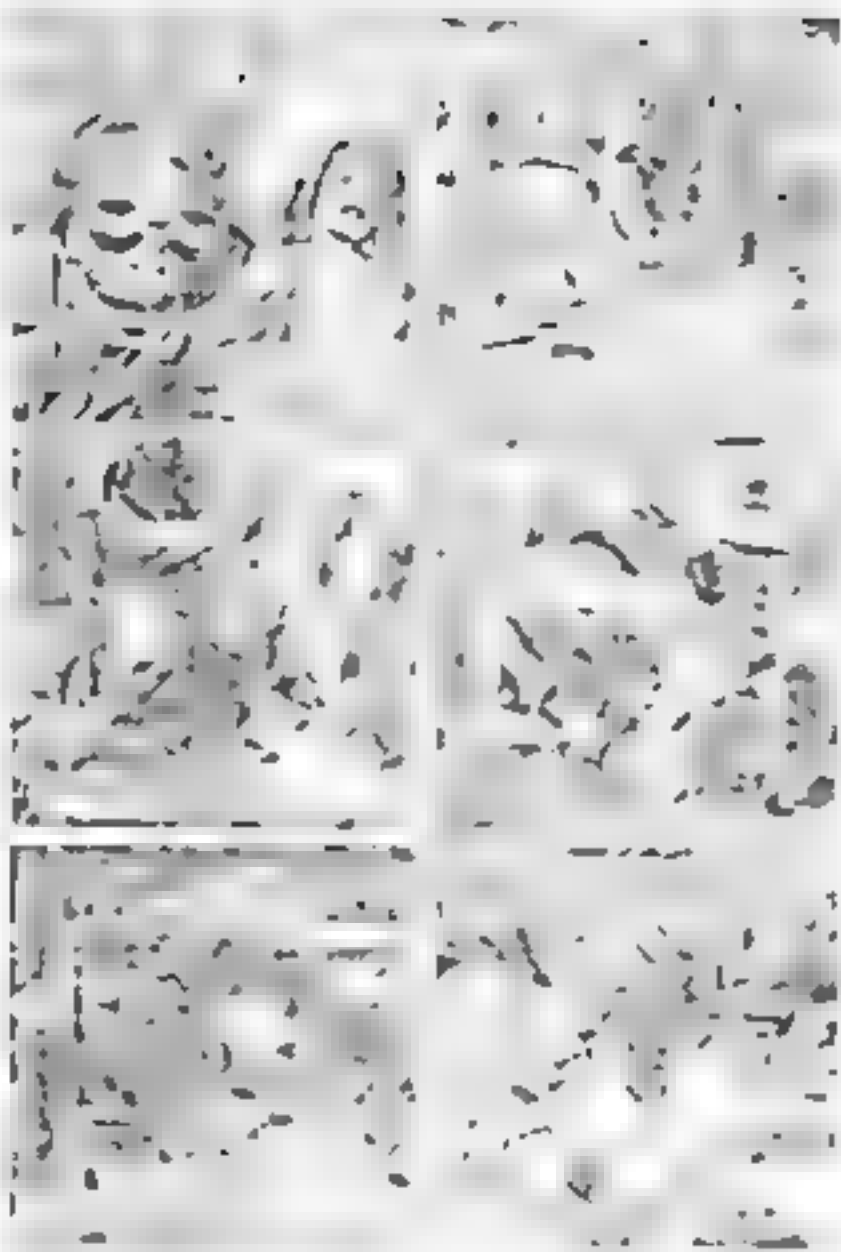
DENNY: Yeah. That might have turned into a really good book if we'd continued.

O'NO: Definitely so. Speaking of *Justice Inc.*, did you and Jack leave behind any unpublished work? It seemed to me that the book was very abruptly cancelled.

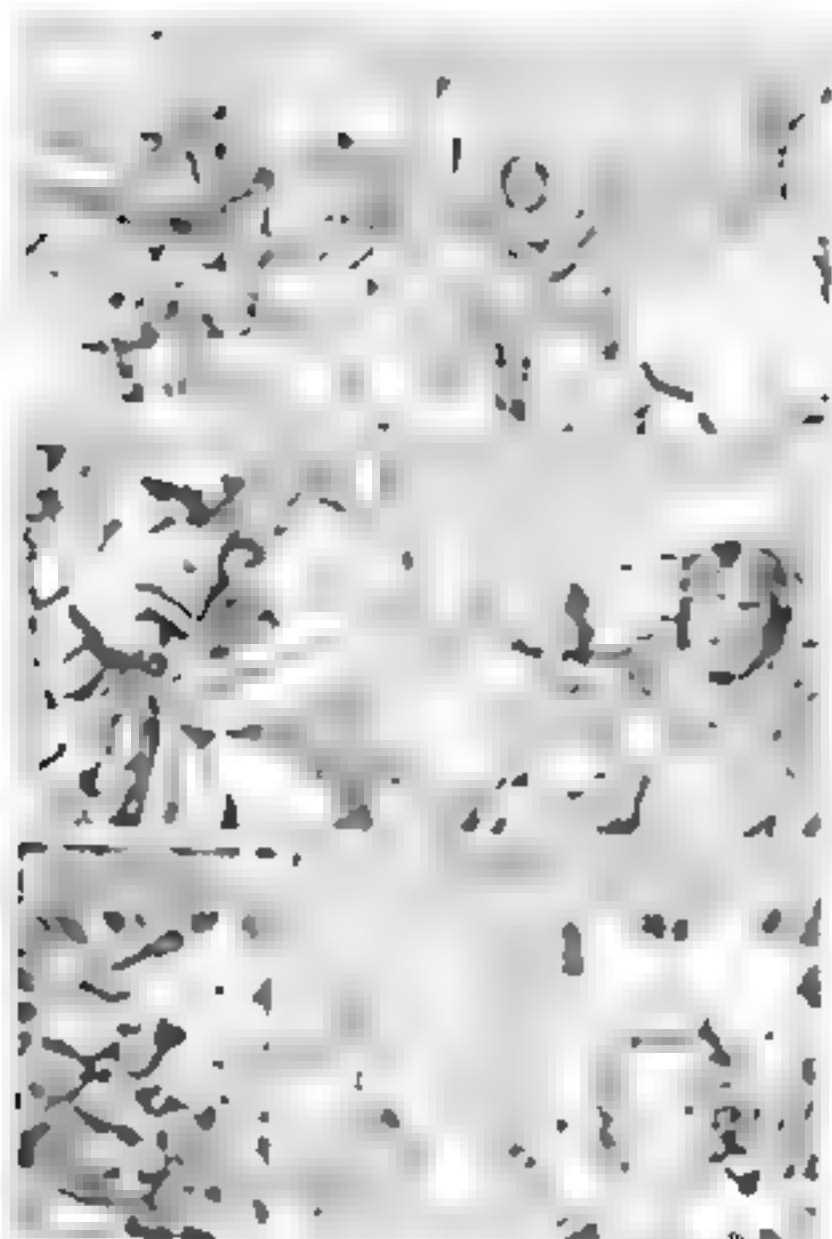
DENNY: I don't think so. But yeah, everything was abruptly cancelled. I found out that *The Shadow* was cancelled when somebody pointed out a subscription blank with *The Shadow* very obviously whited out before it was printed.

O'NO: I know that the mid-70s were a very tough period for DC, when nothing really seemed to work. Was it your idea to adapt *Justice Inc.* from Kenneth Robeson's pulp series and *Kung-Fu Fighter* from Jim Dennis' novel, or was that something that DC brought to you?

DENNY: Well, two separate answers. We had a perceived success with *The Shadow*. It turned out not to be that, or who knows? Maybe it was. Maybe there were business decisions. As said, we were never told why something was cancelled. So, it



was natural to sort of look around and see what else there was in that area and I guess Warner's was in the process of reprinting at least some of the old *Justice Inc.* books. So that would have been the thought behind that one. Richard Dragon was. When the lung fu craze was first happening, *Five Fingers of Death* had opened here. We hadn't seen the first Bruce Lee movie, *Enter the Dragon*, but there'd been enough hype that we media sensitive guys knew it was coming. I think that *Billy Jack* had opened and everybody liked that, and I suggested a lung fu or karate based title at the time and was told, I'm not going to attribute this quote, "I don't like the numbers, chum." I've been trying to figure out what the hell that could have meant ever since, since no numbers existed. Anyway, I was not allowed to do it and two and a half years later by that time Jim Berry and I had published the Richard Dragon novel. And I guess they asked me to do a lung fu title. Anyway, Jim and I had this novel, and saw a chance to get a little money for Jim. So I just suggested that we adapt the novel that already existed, and now that would entail a legion of lawyers. At the time I think some body said "Yeah okay, man." And as I said, I didn't have enough experi-



ence as an editor to realize the need to come up with some sort of icon for that character or enough confidence in myself as an editor to enforce that on the creative people. And it was sort of a book don't think anybody was too interested in, so we played musical artists throughout most of its length. Some of the stuff like think Woody (Woody Wood) did an issue or two looks very interesting. But it was so inconsistent artistically that I'm really surprised it lasted as long as it did. I think it limped along for something like three years.

O'NO: Right. Jim Starlin did an early issue.

DENNY: That's right, yeah. Its legacy is that one of the characters created for it has become one of our good second string, utility infield type players: Lady Shiva. Actually Chuck Dixon does her better than I do but we're now able to do her in the way she should be done. Things had to be kind of watered down a little bit back then.

O'NO: Well, this news on Jim Berry is really a revelation for me because I'm not familiar with him. But my next scheduled

question was to ask you about "Jim Dennis," the supposed author of *Dragon's Fists*, the novel on which DC's Richard Dragon series was based. My guess was that he was a pen name of yours.

DENNY: Yeah, well it was a very clever pen name. "Jim Berry" "Dennis O'Neil," boy we were really imaginative. Jim oh god. I haven't seen him for 10 years. He was, maybe still is, a science writer. And I met him at my wedding, he played guitar there. He was like was, peripherally involved in the Catholic Worker peace movement. My first wife was very much a part of that. And Jim was a writer. I was a writer. He belonged to this group of magazine writers, whom met once a week, and they passed around copies of whatever they were working on and we critiqued it. So I got invited to join that group. I was doing a fair amount of magazine journalism and Jim and I somehow got interested in the martial arts at the same time. So it was natural to collaborate on a book. I don't remember which one of us sold it to Award Books. But the novel was written around the clock as Jim's work schedule was just about opposite of mine. He would get up at 4:30 am and start working at about 5:00 a.m., which was about the time that I was knocking off. So about 4:30 a.m. every night I'd call him; we'd compare notes and decide who was going to do what next. It was sort of like a relay race. I'd pass the baton to him and he'd write the novel for the next five hours. Toward the end, the deadline was looming. So Jim had a farm update and we went to that place and we just sort of isolated ourselves. We both worked for the last five days at adjoining typewriters and would break once or twice a day to drive a few miles and drop the manuscript off at the typist who was sitting there waiting to have her first baby and typing to kill the time. And we beat the deadline and the book got published and died a rapid death.

O'NO: Do you recall when the novel was published?

DENNY: No, but let me find a copy. Yeah, here it is.

"Richard Dragon, Kung-Fu Master" copyright '74

O'NO: In early 1976, you dialogued a New Gods revival story that appeared in *First Issue Special*. The story was edited and plotted by Gerry Conway and drawn by Mike Voelburg. How did you feel about handling Jack's characters without Jack?

DENNY: It was a job. I don't remember feeling anything much one way or the other. That was so long ago I'd forgotten that Gerry had plotted that.

TJK: I found it pretty incredible that there was not one single mention of Jack in the entire book. Even the last-page recap of the New Gods history made no mention of him. Why do you think that was?

DENNY: Maybe they were mad at him. I don't know the circumferences around his leaving DC. And it's the sort of thing I don't think you'll ever get a straight answer on. There's that business that nobody was taking notes and we're all over 50 now (laughing).

TJKC: Any final thoughts on Jack?

DENNY: Oh yeah, think he was a giant. So many things, he did so well. Everything from inventing romance comics to... I think he had the best mythological imagination anybody ever had in our field and maybe anywhere. In his guts he understood what mythological thinking was about. He didn't have much formal education, but neither did Homer. I think he had a gut kind of Jungian imagination and intelligence and way before the rest of us understood what superheroes were about. He could have written a book on it. Ron Whyte once said in a published review that Jack was a genius at drawing for bad reproduction. And the reproduction was pretty dreadful back then, but he kind of understood how to transcend its limitations. That by itself is a hell of an accomplishment. And when he got good repro, he

could rise to that occasion, and did. But no matter what the medium, his work was always distinctive and always very dynamic. There've probably been a handful of geniuses, extraordinarily talented artists, who've done comics: Eisner, George Herriman, maybe Caniff. Jack is definitely in the top five. And in comic books, guess you'd be safe to say maybe he and Eisner are the two best writer-artists the field has ever had. I have just total respect for him. I mean he understood that comics weren't movies. He understood he was working for a page and not a screen. Again, a kind of instinctive grasp of what was important, of what craft was all about, what the limitations were, and how to use the limitations instead of being hampered by them. An incredible man. ●

(A slightly abridged version of this article appears in *The Jack Kirby Collector* # 23, February 1999. Please write John Morrow, 1812 Park Drive, Raleigh, NC 27605, or email: twomorrow@aol.com, to order his excellent publication.)

Inside the Milton Caniff Studio

A first hand account of a giant at work

by Shet Dorf

A lettering man on a comic strip is the first one in the world to read that strip. When it's an adventure strip, as *Steve Canyon* was, the job of lettering is quite entertaining. When Milt Caniff would dictate a set of scripts over the telephone, I'd react like an emotional fan: I couldn't help it. He'd say something like, "In the last panel of the Sunday page we see the figure of a woman seated in a chair. The hook on her hand is tearing up the upholstery as she yells for her servant." And I'd say, "Wow! You're bringing back the Madam Hook character!" Milt loved my reactions to his writing.

Starting out as a longtime reader of his 12 years of *Terry and the Pirates* and over 40 years of *Steve Canyon*, I had a thorough knowledge of what went before. Let's face it, lettering is just boring work. To make it sound fancy some call it Calligraphy, but I call it menial. What really turned me on about the job was that I was indeed the first person in the world to read Steve Canyon, and I was working with a living legend as well!

However, there was a downside. Milt had to write and draw the Sunday pages 12 weeks ahead to allow for the color engraving. Then he'd fill in the dailies with a two-week lead-time. So I read the strip out of order, but was taught Caniff's genius as a writer.

I'll explain: In the last Sunday panel, we'd see Steve in jail. On Monday he escapes and is pursued until Friday's strip. In Saturday's installment he's thrown back in jail. For the newspapers that just ran the Sunday page, the story continued with Steve in his cell. But those newspapers that took both the dailies and the Sundays presented a more complete adventure story.

But that's not all: Some papers only took the dailies. Milt had to write from Saturday to Monday so that the readers wouldn't miss what went on in the Sunday page! Now that's one hell of a writing job! Some comic strips got around this situation by writing a different story in the Sundays (Gasoline Alley did it for years).

Another perk from lettering for Caniff was learning about how he edits, and he was editing all of the time. At first he used to send me the actual strips (always by Special Delivery!) with dialogue pencilled in position. All I had to do was rule out the guidelines and letter over his rough pencils; he composed right on his 3-ply kid finish Bristol board. After about a year of this he trusted me to buy the paper, cut it into strips, rule the guidelines, and then he'd dictate the captions and word balloons to me over the telephone. Then



This page and Next, *Steve Canyon* by Milton Caniff, lettering by Shet Dorf. © Field Enterprises, Inc. 1999

went right to the boards I'd prepared and lettered out the strips. I did the lettering in blocks without word balloons and "tails" because the drawings had not been done yet, and we didn't know where the figures would be standing.

Milt would say "First panel caption: Steve lands his plane and taxis it behind the hangar." Second panel caption: "He hides his plane behind a row of hedges. No, wait a minute. Shit. I used the word plane in the first panel. Let's say 'He hides his craft behind a row of hedges.'" So I heard the Caniff editing process as he was writing, truly a rare opportunity. I learned so much about writing from him.

At the time I had no idea that I was attending "the Caniff School of Creative Writing," but looking back on those 12 years of lettering *Steve Canyon*, I realize just how much I absorbed.

Most writers are readers first, that usually goes with the territory. Milt told me that as a child back in Dayton, Ohio, a wealthy friend of his parents allowed him to cozy-up in his personal library and read from the classics. Milt read *Tom Sawyer*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *Harriet*, *The Jungle Book*, *Treasure Island*, etc.

Years later, while trying to grab the brass ring during the Great

Depression, Milt was in the bullpen at the Associated Press and learned that they needed a new comic strip. Milt remembered his voracious reading as a child and created "Dickie Dare." The strip was about a child who read a book and fell asleep dreaming that he was actually in the story. He'd become the sidekick of a famous fictional character like Aladdin or Robinson Crusoe, and they'd share adventures together. Just when Dickie was about to be boiled alive by cannibals, his mother would wake him up. Patterson from the Chicago Tribune Syndicate saw Caniff's work and asked him to do a regular strip. The result was *Terry and the Pirates*.

Caniff's art was so spectacular that people forgot what a great writer he was. When he left "Terry" to create *Steve Canyon* (a strip he would own), he insisted on complete editorial control. Milt told me that King Features couldn't change a comma without asking him first. He was well aware that other comic strip artists had seen their work spoiled by syndicate editors.

As we approach a new century, I have a strip of my own that I'm trying to sell. It's a thirst I've had since working for the Caniff studio. I have all this knowledge and it must come out! ☺

3 CHESTER'S STRIP (reprinted reproduction)

When I was a child and my imagination was free, I would often dream of being a hero. I would imagine myself as a superhero, with powers and abilities that I could use to help others. I would imagine myself as a superhero, with powers and abilities that I could use to help others.

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Brief encounter \brif in-kaunt-er\ n. a short meeting or moment spent, in which an abbreviated glimpse or small insight about Denny O Neil is discernable.

Elton S. Maggin burst on the comics scene in 1972 with a story that appeared in *Green Lantern* #87 "What Can One Man Do" was a significant accomplishment by any measure, but particularly noteworthy for having contributed to the important *Green Lantern*/*Green Arrow* series. The story well captured the passionate, activist personality Denny was developing for *Green Arrow*. Maggin has long acknowledged Denny O Neil as the guy who made him realize someone actually wrote comic books. Maggin went on to establish himself as the *Superman* writer of the '70s and '80s with an exciting 13 year run, taking over just after Denny's one year stint on the *Man of Steel*.

Prior to launching his astonishing career, Elton spent sometime hanging around the DC offices in Manhattan soaking up influences. He recalled for us his first meeting with Denny:

"When I first met Denny I was a little disappointed. He was huddled in the coffee room at the old DC Comics office on Third Avenue and Julie Schwartz introduced us. I had just read a script of his for a *Batman* story that hadn't come out yet—the one where Batman first met Talia al Ghul's daughter—and I told him, 'really liked it.' "Yeah," he said over his coffee, "just one masterpiece after another" or something like that. It took me about a month to realize that he was trying to be self-effacing and didn't know how in fact, as far as I could tell, he was turning out one masterpiece after another those days and everyone but Denny seemed to know it. "Was I or so what did I know?" It took me that month to realize how much I really liked the guy." ☺

Filling in the Shadows

Remaking the Batman 1969 to 1973 Schwartz, Adams and O'Neil join forces to Reconstruct the Dark Knight Detective

by Kevin Bunting

The first Batman story Denny O'Neil wrote was "Carnival of the Cursed." It was written in 1969 as a fill-in assignment for Julie Schwartz and was published in *Batman* #224, August 1970. O'Neil's first Batman story to see print was drawn by Neal Adams and appeared in *Detective Comics* #395, the January 1970 issue. That story was "Secret of the Waiting Graves" and the concepts, themes and images it expressed, still inspire the Batman character to this day. In one dramatic stroke, the corbalt image of the television show was cast aside and Batman was returned to the night from which he had begun.

Today, O'Neil is group editor of DC's Batman family of comic books and oversees the publication of some seven regular monthly titles. He has seen the popularity of Batman spill over from the comics into big-time Hollywood movies and the highly acclaimed animated television series.

The Batman has been in regular publication since Bob Kane first drew the character more than half a century ago. Much of what modern fans associate with Batman, and perhaps a partial explanation of the character's hold on the psyche of American popular culture, is attributable to what happened in late 1968. That was the year three of comics' very best—Julie Schwartz, Neal Adams, and Denny O'Neil—came together to re-establish the roots of the character and lay the foundation upon which much of today's wildly successful Batman franchise is built. And it all came about due to slumping sales figures and a cancelled television series.

It was almost as though, at DC Comics, there were writers that had a fingernail held on everything that was going on. Any possibility that I was introducing into the process indicated some possible movement forward, but the writers were still very well entrenched. It was very clear to some of us that Batman could use some changes.

Neal Adams, August 1967

I usually depends on your age. Ask any ten old enough to have begun reading comics prior to the release of *Elvis* first record and they'll invariably tell you the television show was awful a travesty, a mockery of a beloved art form. Ask the same question of a fan just five years younger and they'll smile in fond remembrance and probably tell you the Batman television series is what turned them on to comics in the first place.

Regardless of where you fall in the great debate, it is impossible to deny the TV show's popularity. The wacky fight scenes, the wild colored 'sound effects', the deadpan delivery of ridiculous exclamatory phrases, the ludicrous cliffhangers—all were ratings gold for ABC. The television screen made comics Pop Art.

For good or bad, the TV show influenced the comic books from which it had sprung. The problem was, the comic books had been camp before the show had. In fact, the TV show captured the mock-seriousness of the comics better than some fans would care to admit. So by the time the show was cancelled

in 1968 the comic books, which had sought to leverage the popularity of its televised counter part, had grown stale. Batman was in need of changes. Fortunately, Julie Schwartz was in charge and he had already guided Batman through an earlier period of transition.

I knew when I was doing Batman I was going to have him look the way he was billed in the early days, as the world's greatest detective. We would have a lot of detective work for him, solving puzzles, a lot of traps and so on.

Julie Schwartz, September 1967

Julie Schwartz was a well-seasoned pro by the time he took over the regular Batman titles, *Batman* and *Detective Comics* in 1964. He'd gotten his start in science fiction when he and his friend Mort Weisinger created *The Time Traveler*, a magazine for sci-fi fans. Next followed a successful stint as a literary agent where he developed a knack for bringing out the best in his writers including a young Ray Bradbury and Alfred Bester. He began editing comics in 1944 for what was then called All-American Comics. Schwartz's skill in developing creative talent served him well in his role as editor, while his love and knowledge of science fiction provided much of the inspiration for what has become known as the Silver Age of Comics.

Schwartz took over the slumping Batman two years before the television show premiered in January 1966 and set about creating what was called at the time the "New Look." He drafted Carmine Infantino to update the look of Batman and suggested the yellow oval around the bat emblem to add visual interest. Next, Schwartz sought to take the character from the late '50s faze into science fiction and return Batman to his roots as the world's Greatest Detective, an ironic twist given Schwartz's background and success with science fiction themes. The crazy costumed villains remained and the Dynamic Duo's punches still came with a wisecrack attached, but Schwartz's veteran stable of writers including John Broome and Gardner Fox delivered a lot of clever detective work and some inventive death traps. It was, after all, Schwartz's Batman that originally inspired the television series.

After the assassinations and riots, the questions and cultural upheaval of 1968, the puns and cute cleverness of camp just seemed out of place. By 1969, Broome was contributing less and less, Fox was 59-years-old, and Infantino had been kicked way upstairs. The old guard was fading away and the next generation of writers and artists, with a whole different vision of comics, were making their presence felt.

Teenagers too, were changing. Marvel's quirky heroes-with hang-ups had been registering with fans more than DC's stable of comic icons. But Schwartz, the greatest pure editor in comics, was never far removed from fandom. He heeded the clamor for change and dramatically altered the dynamics of Batman with two surprisingly simple steps: Schwartz had writer Frank Robbins send Dick Grayson off to college and move Bruce Wayne and Alfred

out of Wayne Manor and into the middle of downtown Gotham City.

With the character now stripped to its basics, recast as the lone crime-fighter at the roots of his origin, Julie Schwartz then demonstrated another of his editorial skills – matching the right talent to the right material. Neal Adams had worked with Julie on *The Spectre* and was just then delivering his stunning interpretation of Batman in the Murray Boltinoff edited *Brave & Bold*. Meanwhile, Denny O’Neil was remaking *Wonder Woman* with Mike Sekowsky and adding some much needed characterization to Schwartz’s own *Justice League of America*. Schwartz soon brought the pair together and the version of Batman they created lives to this day.

It (working on B&B) was a ploy to do Batman, and to change Batman as much as possible.

Neal Adams

After working on comic strips like *Ben Casey* and bumping around the edge of comics for a short while, Neal Adams exploded on to the scene in December 1967 with *Deadman* in *Strange Adventures*. His naturalistic style and startling realism were an instant sensation. Fans clamored for more Adams and the powers that were were happy to give it to them. Almost instantly, Adams began doing the covers for the entire Superman line, DC’s most profitable comics.

That Adams could do it all there was no doubt – from westerns to war, from super heroes like *The Spectre* to super silly like *Jerry Lewis*. His drawings conveyed real emotions, his inking was bold and expressive. His page layouts and panel breakdowns constituted the most exciting special effects available until George Lucas’ *Star Wars* flashed across movie screens in 1977. His breathtaking use of perspective and point-of-view camera angles appeared more influenced by Jean-Luc Godard than by Joe Kubert.

Adams launched his vision of Batman in *Brave and Bold* #79. Accustomed to working from photos to achieve such realism, Adams began his reworking by making Batman look more like a bat. He elongated the ears of the cowl. He played tricks with Batman’s cape, sometimes depicting it at improbable lengths. In an Adams drawn issue the Batman seemed to fly.

Throughout the decade, the Batman books had looked, quite literally, “square.” One square panel followed by another square panel, one page of square panels led to another and so on. Adams layouts opened up the pages. The action of a Batman story would now spill over panels, leap off the page. The reader could feel the physical power of Batman, sense the swiftness of his moves. If there really were a Batman, he’d have to look like this.

Not only did Neal Adams convey the physical action of the stories, but the emotional drama as well. The expressions of the characters communicated the thoughts and ideas their words suggested – particularly the emotions of the Batman himself. Prior to Neal’s work, the white ovals used to depict Batman’s eyes behind the cowl had often given the character a vacant, detached look. With Adams’ arrival, Batman’s face became far more expressive. The reader became aware of just how difficult a situation was. Now Batman’s intelligence could be perceived not just read about.

Once I read a piece by Alfred Bester talking about how much fun it is to write obsessed characters and that sort of focused it for me. I think at that point I began to understand what that guy was about. I mean, nobody had ever quite

explained it in those terms before. Nobody tried to give him very much psychology at all beyond the inspiration that Finger and Kane had of the origin. But, you stop to think ‘of course he’d be obsessed,’ and then with that as a starting place, a lot of the rest of it falls into line.

Denny O’Neil, July 1997

Denny O’Neil began his career at DC in 1967 when he and some fellow freelancers – including Jim Aparo and Steve Skeates – came over from Charlton Comics with Dick Giordano. His early assignments included *Bomba* (the Jungle Boy) and Steve Ditko’s *Beware the Creeper*. He also provided dialogue for the short-lived but highly acclaimed *Bat Lash*.

In 1968 O’Neil became the regular writer of two major titles, *Wonder Woman* and the *Justice League of America*. Significant changes were instituted almost immediately in both books. The changes introduced what would

become a major theme of O’Neil’s work: stripping away the pretense from a character to reveal the humanity within. Often that meant reducing a hero’s power, or removing them completely as in the case of *Wonder Woman*.

O’Neil’s preference for realistic drama precluded the sort of artifice or false pretense often required in stories about superheroes. Limiting super-powers made the characters more manageable for the writer. The newfound vulnerability meant the establishment of conflict, the key element in dramatic writing, could be extracted from a more genuine perspective. Subtle character studies and personal nuance became features of any O’Neil authored story.

Characterization was the key. The humanity of the Batman was, of course, already well established. Teaming up the writer and the character was a natural. O’Neil’s stories moved deeper



Lo Ling vs. the Batman; Neal Adams sketch for Batman #243 splash page © DC Comics 1999

into Batman's personality. The author rarely utilized the vast array of gadgets that the Batman had accumulated over the years. Batman relied on his intelligence, his physical prowess, his training, his wit. A reader was more likely to find out that the Batman was a fan of New Orleans jazz or a devotee of various martial arts than to learn the latest contents of the utility belt.

Unlike his contemporaries, whose biggest influences were the comics of the golden age, O'Neil's influences were similar to the earlier generation of writers. Like Bill Finger, the first Batman writer, O'Neil was influenced by *The Shadow*. In fact, of all the previous Batman writers, O'Neil's work is most reminiscent of Bill Finger. Both writers acknowledged the influence of Hollywood film and the Doc Savage stories of the 1930s. Both writers placed an emphasis on the character's humanity, his athletic ability, his powers of observation. O'Neil referred to the character as "the Batman" just as Finger had in the beginning. He revived Two-Face and the Joker, villains Finger had been the first to write.

Like Finger, O'Neil understood the dramatic energy inherent in the Batman's origin: the brutal murder of his parents, the helplessness of the small boy, the brooding leading to obsession, the fear of the dark and the assimilation of the darkness in the symbol of the bat. It is truly a beautiful origin story—simple, profound, complete.

Did you ever see a movie called *"Patsy Kelly's Blues"*? It starts off with a trumpet. Dewey's story starts off the same way. I'm a big, big New Orleans jazz fan so I read him into doing that.

Julie Schwartz

It is no coincidence that the author's work improved under the editorship of Julie Schwartz. While always a proficient craftsman, O'Neil's scripting became sleeker and more polished under the editor's guidance. The regular Thursday sessions in Schwartz's office at DC became shorter. If O'Neil arrived with an idea for a story, Schwartz would listen and approve. If the writer had drawn a blank, he'd come away with an idea. The patient and professional Schwartz was exactly the type of editor the writer needed.

The first Batman story O'Neil wrote was actually a fill-in assignment. Based on a suggestion from Julie Schwartz, the story is set in New Orleans and follows the Batman as he investigates the murder of "Blind Buddy" Haiden. The story is a textbook example of a Schwartz Batman story: the Caped Crusader becomes aware of a crime, he investigates, is trapped, escapes, and defeats the criminal. The formula is very neat and a tidy end contained late results. Often, a conveniently placed clue is provided for the reader to ponder along with the *Mindful Manhunter* as the investigation begins.

In a short period of time O'Neil was able to apply this basic crime-action-solution formula with some imaginative twists. In "At Dawn Dies Mary MacGuffin" Batman essentially creates his own trap when he tries to solve a hostage situation and the theft of top-secret government papers. He attempts to intercept a phone call from the kidnapper, but his boldness backfires when the villain recognizes Batman's play and the life of the hostage, Mary MacGuffin, is placed in even greater danger. A city official and some federal agents who are attempting to hold up the investigation waiting for proper authority further complicate the trap. The city official is suspicious of the Batman and convinces the federal

agents to prohibit the Batman's further involvement in the case. The Batman's blunder has placed the life of an innocent woman, and his own reputation, in extreme jeopardy.

Batman's ambivalence toward the authorities in the story was one more aspect of the character O'Neil began exploring. As a young, politically aware person of the 60s, O'Neil and his contemporaries had the same sort of feelings toward people in power. Government officials screwed up in real life, why wouldn't they in a Batman story? Though Batman was clearly on the side of the law, he preferred to trust in his own beliefs and his own sense of right and wrong. This ambivalence toward authority provided the Batman with the rebellious counter-culture spirit he DC stole from Superman lacked. The Batman's approximation of the increasingly popular anti-hero stance was very much in line with the changing times.

Not only were the times changing, but the dreaded Comics Code Authority was changing as well. Established in the early 1950s, the code was an almost hysterical overreaction to juvenile delinquency. Lawmakers were convinced comics were the source of such behavior. The code restricted the subject matter of comic books, completely wiping out the more adult-themed horror books of the popular EC Comics line. No longer able to depict hard-hitting crime, the Batman of the early 60s seemed to be chasing a never-ending string of jewel thieves who were robbing museums and bank vaults of an apparently inexhaustible supply of rare diamonds.

The loosening of the code allowed real life to creep back into comics. Batman could now battle real criminals; criminals like the ones who had killed his parents. In the "Mary MacGuffin" story the villain, Colonel Sulphur, is an international terrorist and a killer with his own grim obsessions: he considers sunrise to be a lucky omen, and therefore plans his most violent attacks for that hour of the day. In the story's final confrontation, Sulphur gains the upper hand, but as he moves to strike, the first rays of the sun momentarily blind him and the Batman is able to subdue him.

The sudden reversal of circumstance or the well-timed stroke of good luck had long been a device used by Batman writers and the writers of comics in general. In Julie Schwartz's science-fiction based titles, the change in fortune was usually attributable to some little-known scientific fact. In prior issues of the Batman books, a sudden bolt of lightning, a telepathic message to Robin or a run in Batgirl's tight's could provide the split second needed to turn certain disaster into justice won. By delving more into the psychological aspects of Batman's character by reviving the mystery intended by the assumption of the bat symbol, O'Neil was able to portray the reversals as bits of karma, aspects of fate derived from the criminal's specific nature, or the Batman's own legend.

He (Dewey O'Neil) is able to create drama within the story that allows a movie book artist and possibly, if he were working on the set (interviewer, you a director, man, know to do some interesting and dramatic things. And they weren't all the same all the time. (He) was a grifter, more realistic dialogue and even when he would handle a simple line, he would handle it with a certain amount of street-direction. Dewey would go right to the core of the thing, say the words that had to be said, and move on. And I found that to be very refreshing, very good. It also added a certain air of reality to Batman, since I had twisted Batman into a slightly more

realistic character, who didn't walk around in the daytime with his underwear on, but rather a creature of the night who haunted the shadows. Denny was very sympathetic to that approach. I don't know if Denny thinks that he created that, or Bob Kane created that, or I created that, but we certainly were all of the same mind.

Neal Adams

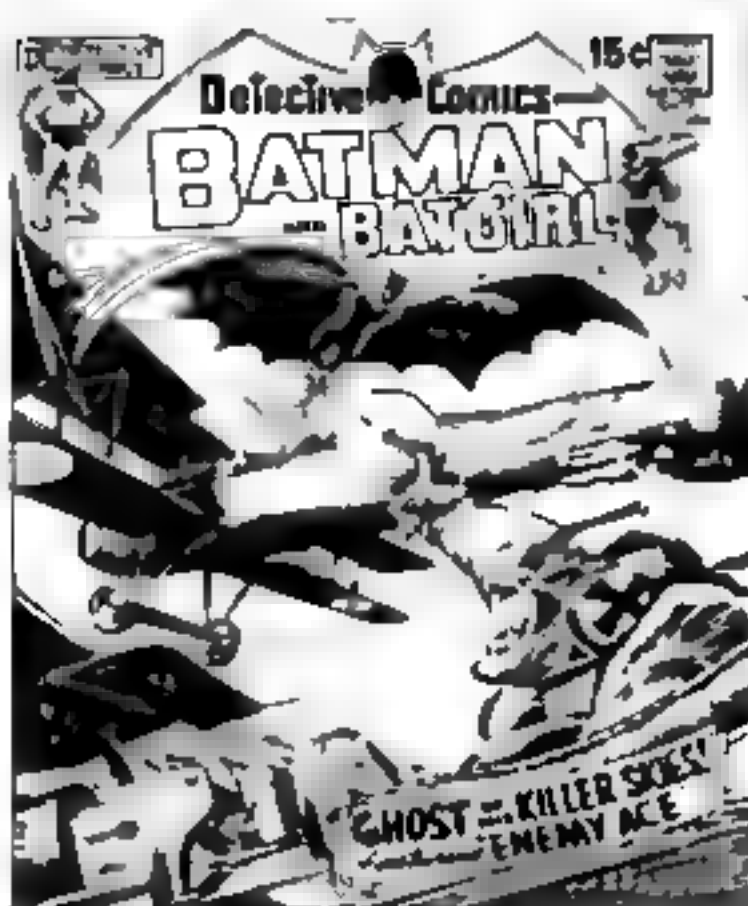
"The Secret of the Waiting Graves" was not a typical Schwartz edited Batman story. The names of the antagonists, Juan and Dolores Muerto, with their play on the Spanish word for "dead" harkened back to the puns of the camp period, but this story was darker moodier. The detective work was hard and physical, not cerebral and clever like typical Schwartz edited stories. The Batman battles a pair of wolves and falcons trained to kill. Like something from a Jungian nightmare, he is lured to the basement of an abandoned adobe, where he confronts the Muertos, but their secret cache of narcotic flowers induce terrifying illusions from within his own mind.

The subject matter of the story, from the first scene standing before two open graves on a wind swept hillside in central Mexico, to the supernatural aura of the Muertos themselves, is perfectly suited to the Dark Knight Detective. The case unfolds with the seeming inevitability of a dream and the action is forced to trail the mystery of the story not lead it. The Batman, and the reader too, can never predict what will happen next. If Neal Adams drew the Batman as a creature that haunted the shadows of the nighttime, Denny O'Neil wrote the Batman as a character who haunted the shadows of the reader's mind.

By using the psychological perplexity of the character as a metaphor in his stories, O'Neil was able to change the Batman from a static individual to a dynamic personality who was constantly revealing more about himself, always adding to the mythos. Bruce Wayne was continually and more fully becoming the Batman with every test of his will. The writer was perfectly complimented in his task by Adams' artwork. The realism Adams brought to the Batman titles made it all seem believable: anything seemed possible in the hands of O'Neil and Adams.

In "Ghost of the Killer Slices" O'Neil cleverly handled an appearance of Joe Kubert and Robert Kanigher's World War aviation hero Enemy Ace. Rittermeister Hans Von Hammer was the most intriguing character from DC's celebrated line of war books. A war hero who detested war, Von Hammer was a complex individual whose mastery of aerial combat isolated him from his fellow men much as Bruce Wayne's obsession with avenging crime isolates him. O'Neil's story involves Bruce Wayne funding a movie honoring Von Hammer's compassion and nobility. Accidents and murder besiege the cast and crew when a saboteur tries to stop the film for its anti-war message. In the end, the ghost of Von Hammer aids Batman in a climatic air battle with the saboteur/murderer. The story is a fitting tribute to Kubert and Kanigher. Neal Adams' rendering of the vintage aircraft and the image of Enemy Ace emblazoned across the sky pay apt homage to Kubert's mighty war portfolio. O'Neil's focus on the uniqueness of the Rittermeister's character and its correlation to Bruce Wayne's, parallels the corresponding dedication to characterization O'Neil and Kanigher shared.

Upper Right: These guys can do anything. Batman drops in on Enemy Ace. Neal Adams cover art for Detective Comics #404. © DC Comics Inc. 1975



In characterization, just as much as in the structure of events, one ought always to look for what is necessary or probable; it should be necessary or probable that this kind of person says or does this kind of thing, and it should be necessary or probable that this happens after that.

Aristotle
from Poetics

Between 1969 and 1973 O'Neil and Adams combined on 11 stories for the Schwartz edited Batman books and one story for Murray Boltinoff's *Brave and Bold*. In all his Batman work, O'Neil demonstrated a wide range of literary styles and influences. Elements of plot could be borrowed and often were from the pulp fiction stories of the 1930s, the macabre or old Hollywood films, but the emphasis was always on the characters and their conflicts were metaphors for the larger conflicts of human nature.

Although the era saw the revival of many aspects of the Batman's past, perhaps the best remembered was the revival of two of the Batman's archenemies. The Joker and Two-Face might be the most recognizable villains in all of comic book history. They are also brilliant characters full of narrative possibilities.

Indeed in "The Joker's Five - Way Revenge" O'Neil re-introduced the Joker as the psychotic murderer he'd been in the early 1940's. The brilliant splash page captures the significance of the revival and is an excellent example of the magic the writer and artist could generate. O'Neil's lyrical prose summons the Joker from a black pool as nature itself betrays his evil presence, while Adams' cackling wicked-eyed, madman, a malevolent grin fixed upon his face, hurtles through the rain. The Joker returns to

Gotham convinced that one of the members of his old gang had sold him out. He proceeds to hunt down his old cronies leaving a string of bodies in his wake. This portrait of the joker O'Neil's description of his personal character and Adams' rendering of his wild, sinister appearance gives the character a disturbing presence. He moves through the story like a plague.

The story that featured the return of Two-Face contained one of O'Neil's most ingenious crimes. "Half an Evil" begins with the highjacking of a balloon from the regular Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade (disguised as the Gotham City Merchants Parade for this story). Two-Face and his gang then steal an ancient two-masted schooner and proceed to sink it. The sunken schooner filled with a hidden treasure of gold doubloons, drifts to a quiet bay south of Gotham where Two-Face raises it by inflating the previously highjacked balloon. The story features a concise two-page summary of former District Attorney Harvey Dent's transformation into his criminal persona, Two-Face. O'Neil neatly utilizes the dual nature of Two-Face's identity as the Batman appeals to the good half of Dent's personality to defeat him.

In addition to the reveal of the classic villains, O'Neil created one of his own: Ras Al Ghul, the Demon. The story that introduced Ras, "Daughter of the Demon," is a pulp styled master piece. Robin, in a rare appearance in the Batman stories from this era, has been abducted. The mysterious Ras arrives in the Batcave having deduced the Batman's secret identity as Bruce Wayne.

Talia, a previous acquaintance of the Batman and Ras' own daughter, has also been abducted and the mysterious villain enlists the help of the Batman to track down the kidnappers. The tale unfolds like a depression era Saturday matinee adventure serial. The locale shifts from the Batcave to the dangerous back streets of Calcutta, India, and to the forbidding reaches of the Himalayas. Along the way there are hints of the worldwide scope of Al Ghul's criminal organization and his links to a cult of killers from the Far East known fittingly as the Brotherhood of the Demon. In an interesting reversal, one the Dark Knight Detective has long perceived, the kidnapping has been a trick. Ras had devised the kidnappings to test the skills of the Detective, and the story ends with Ras offering the Batman his alluring daughter Talia and the most intriguing

"Daughter of the Demon" is an interesting story not only because it introduced one of the most complicated and fascinating of the Batman's enemies, but also because it highlights O'Neil's development as a writer. The elements of Schwartz's Batman formula are so perfectly integrated with the writer's own style their structure is virtually imperceptible. The detective work, the reader's clue, the trap, all are seamlessly woven into the fabric of the story. O'Neil adds his own touch, a trace of the hard-boiled crime fiction of the 1940s when the Batman confronts the kidnappers with words Raymond Chandler might have placed in the mouth of Philip Marlowe.

I think I write differently for Neal. It's a hard process to describe. It's largely non-verbal, but in your head, there is a sense of what the art work will look like, a sense of what the artist would give you and I think that is bound to have an influence on your writing. Particularly, if it's such a strong artist as Neal, I would trust him to deliver.

Denny O'Neil

Ras Al Ghul's daughter Talia had been introduced in two earlier O'Neil stories which had appeared in Detective Comics. The writer was populating Batman's world with his own cast of characters and interlocking individual stand alone stories into a larger developing narrative.

Perhaps the most ambitious attempt at expanding the narrative confines of the comic book was a four-part story in which the Batman decides to hunt down Ras Al Ghul and bring him to justice. Part one of the story appeared in Batman #242, and was actually drawn by regular Batman artist Irv Novick. The story begins when the Batman stages Bruce Wayne's widely publicized disappearance. The Batman employs the ruse to keep Ras Al Ghul, who knows his secret identity, from striking at him as Bruce Wayne. Next, he proceeds to recruit a scientist and an assassin, Lo Ling, who happens to owe his life to Ras Al Ghul, to assist him in his battle against Ras. The team flies to Switzerland to confront the Demon, but are surprised to find him already dead. There is however more to Ras Al Ghul than first meets the eye. It turns out Ras is able to revive himself by immersion in the Lazarus Pit, a bubbling vat of chemicals with the power to restore his life. Legend claims that Ras has lived many lifetimes.

The restored Ras confronts the team, badly injures Lo Ling, and escapes with Talia. The Batman now must continue the chase alone. He tracks Ras to the desert where the two adversaries engage in a duel. Batman, however, is stung by a deadly scorpion and is left to die. Talia's love for Batman leads her to secretly



Adams and O'Neil magic: the Batman delivers Chenevresque speech in Batman #232. Art by Neal Adams and Dick Giordano, script by Denny O'Neil. © DC Comics 1999



supply him with an antidote to the poison. Batman races from the desert sand, makes his way to Ras' tent, and subdues him.

Part three of the story—which contained the desert battle with Ras, appeared in *Batman* #244. The issue features a dramatic Neal Adams cover and some of the most physical action sequences of Adams' Batman run. The final scene of Talia embracing the Batman is also one of the most provocative kissing scenes in all of comics.

After completing his action against Ras Al Ghul, the Batman returns to Gotham to resolve the Bruce Wayne disappearance. But that situation has become much more complicated. One of Gotham City's leading political bosses plans to use forged documents to charge his political rival with the murder of Bruce Wayne. The Batman must expose the forgery and resolve Bruce Wayne's disappearance, but to do so he will have to involve himself in Gotham City politics.

The story completes the circle. The technique has come full circle as well. Parts one and four evoke the early '70s influenced Hollywood update of film noir with their emphasis on corruption, street smart detective work, and political undertones. In fact, the leather coated assassin Lo Ling and the smart dressing hustler Matches Malone, look straight out of a casting call for *The French Connection* or Clint Eastwood's *Dirty Harry* films. The middle two parts, with their globe-trotting to exotic locations, suggest the Doc Savage stories originally published under the pen name of Kenneth Robeson—and frequently written by Lester Dent—beginning in the 1930s and reprinted in paperback form by *Bantam* in the '60s and '70s.

I don't think anybody ever works together strongly and doesn't have negative things happen. I never dwell on those things. I look at the good side and to me the good side was that we worked very well together and turned out some of the best comic books that have ever appeared on the printed page. And I'm very proud of that and very happy with the relationship. I couldn't have asked for better.

—Neal Adams

The O'Neil/Adams collaborations are significant not only as a group, but as individual stories as well. "A Vow from the Grave" is an interesting tale of outcasts and humanity. While chasing an escaped murderer, the Batman stumbles upon a group of four stranded carnival sideshow performers, including a strange seal-like child. The most normal looking character in the whole story is the escaped murderer, as O'Neil ironically demonstrates that it's compassion not anatomy that makes us human. This story about aspects of human character also features some of Neal Adams' most expressive character close-ups.

"Night of the Reaper" has long been a favorite with fans due to its depiction of the famous Astor-Rand Halloween parade. Based on an idea from Barry Windsor-Smith and Marlan Ellison, the story features comic book appearances by actual DC writers and artists (Windsor-Smith, Len Wein, Gerry Conway and DeVito O'Neil himself among others). O'Neil still manages to sneak in a poignant perspective on revenge and its effects on the human soul.

In "Red Water/Crimson Death" the Batman saves a small boy and an Irish fishing village with some help from the ghost of King Hugh. *Brave & Bold* usually featured stories in which the Batman teamed-up with another DC hero. For "Red Water" the Batman

teams up with *The House of Mystery*, a DC horror title edited by Joe Orlando which featured a character/narrator similar to the *John* Warren published *Eerie* and *Creepy* magazines. Adams inks his own pencils for this story with beautiful effect.

From "The Secret of the Waning Graves" to "The Joker's Five-Way Revenge", the four-year period between 1969 and 1973 featured more than its share of the Batman's best stories. This comes as no surprise considering the contributions of three of the greatest talents comic books have ever seen. All three men were delivering some of the finest work of their storied careers.

Julie Schwartz's editorship of the Batman titles is perhaps the most overlooked aspect of his distinguished career. Of course, the father of the Silver Age has significant credits. His reintroduction of the superheroes of the Golden Age like the Flash and Green Lantern and his launching of the *Justice League of America* virtually defined an era. His books were always well plotted, always intelligent. Still, his guidance of at least the second most recognizable hero in comic book history during two significant periods of transition is remarkable. His early work on Batman contributed to the launching of the TV show and the rise of *Batmania*, while his steady hand through the post-TV series funk confirmed the character's lasting impact on a whole new generation of fans.

Neal Adams was the most dominant artist in all of comics during this period. His Batman work is among the best of his brilliant career and might be his most lasting impact on the comic's medium. When people imagine the Batman they usually imagine a Neal Adams drawing. Hollywood clearly borrowed his



Neal Adams sketch for the cover of *Batman* #232, the issue which introduced Ras Al Ghul. © DC Comics 1999

vision of the Joker and Two-Face for the big budget Batman movies of the late '80s and '90s and his renditions continue to inform the images of those characters today. Adams' influence in the comics industry was immediate and enduring. He has had many, many imitators since, but precious few equals.

Denny O'Neil is best known for his contribution of relevance to comics. While not as socially conscious as the groundbreaking *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* series, his Batman work was firmly rooted in the real world and featured some of the best pure storytelling of his career. A reader gets the impression O'Neil was not approaching these as mere comic books but as blue-collar literature. His concentration on characterization before plot was a break from the writers of the past. His concern for content over form set him apart from his contemporaries of the '60s and '70s. He showed the way to a more personal, naturalistic style of comic book writing. His realization of the dramatic possibilities within the Batman character influenced not only the stories he wrote, but the writers who followed him as well. Denny O'Neil's impact on the Batman character has been the most important and influential since Bob Kane and Bill Finger. 🍎

O'Neil/Adams/Schwartz Batman Checklist

❑ **Detective Comics #395**, January 1970, "The Secret of the Waiting Graves"

Other contributors: Dick Giordano inks.

❑ **Detective Comics #397** March 1970, "Paint a Picture of Peril"

Other contributors: Dick Giordano inks.

❑ **Detective Comics #404** October 1970, "Ghost of the Killer Skies"

Other contributors: Dick Giordano inks.

❑ **The Brave and the Bold #93**, December/January 1970-71 "Red Water Crimson Death"

Other contributors: edited by Murray Boltinoff

❑ **Detective Comics #410**, April 1971 "A Vow from the Grave"

Other contributors: Dick Giordano inks.

❑ **Batman #232**, June 1971, "Daughter of the Demon"

Other contributors: Dick Giordano inks.

❑ **Batman #234**, August 1971 "Half an Evil"

Other contributors: Dick Giordano inks.

❑ **Batman #237**, December 1971 "Night of the Reaper"

Other contributors: Dick Giordano inks. "From an idea by Berni Wrightson with an assist from Marlan Ellison"

❑ **Batman #243** August 1972 "The Lazarus Pit"

Other contributors: Dick Giordano inks.

❑ **Batman #244**, September 1972 "The Demon Lives Again"

Other contributors: Dick Giordano inks.

❑ **Batman #246**, October 1972, "The Bruce Wayne Murder Case"

Other contributors: Dick Giordano inks.

❑ **Batman #251** September 1973, "The Joker's Five-Way Revenge"

Other contributors: none

Bronze Age Rookie of the Year!

Elliot S. Maggin eases the transition from the Silver Age +

by Bob Brodsky

"I've been a comic editor for over 27 years and never have ever come across a "first-time" script... that came within a light-year of equaling "What Can One Man Do?" Indeed to equalize this thrilling experience, must go back three decades when, as a literary agent, I sold the very first story of a young Ray Bradbury!"
-Julius Schwartz, 1972

"...But first and foremost to Elliot S. Maggin who gave me x-ray eyes and taught me to fly"

-Mark Waid, 1996 Dedication to *Kingdom Come*.

Elliot S. Maggin arrived at DC Comics at the end of the "relevance" era on the cusp where Silver met Bronze.

Maggin wrote the Green Arrow story "What Can One Man Do?" as a term project for an American Social History course while he was a student at Brandeis University. He submitted the piece to editor Julius Schwartz, who published it in *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* #87 (Dec. 1971/Jan. 1972).

Maggin commented in *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* #89's (April/May 1972) letter page:

"...A junior in college, an editor of my school newspaper a prospective law or journalism student... I've always been interested in the comics medium enough to have my childhood code of values significantly influenced by Superman, and my appreciation of good writing extend to the art of such as Gardner Fox and Denny O'Neil."

Maggin would go on to punch out a legacy in comics rivaling both Fox and O'Neil. Although best remembered for a 15+ year run as writer of Superman, Maggin wrote roughly 500 scripts for other Schwartz titles including *Shazam!*, *Batman*, *Wonder Woman*, and a series of Green Arrow stories in *Action Comics*.

Maggin, now 49, lives in Southern California with his wife, two children, and, says the writer, "enough data processing power to operate a small, fairly backward, country."

Still Brooklyn sharp, Maggin has taught journalism, run for the United States Congress, and spent time as a ski bum. He also wrote the best selling Superman novels *Last Son of Krypton* and *Miracle Monday*.

Now a novelist and screenwriter, Maggin has not written for comics since the late 1980s. He remains connected to the medium through his latest novels: *Generation X* and *Kingdom Come*.

Our recent conversation with Maggin began with "What Can One Man Do?" As its title implies, the story is introspective. Oliver (Green Arrow) Queen stands on the crossroads - struggling to define and reconcile his two selves. The piece is a sequel of sorts to Adams' and Bob Haney's "The Senator's Been Shot," the extraordinary story that introduced the new Green Arrow (*Brave*



Splash page for "What Can One Man Do?" from *GLA/GA* #87. Art by Neal Adams and Dick Giordano, script by Elliot S! Maggin. © DC Comics 1999

E Bold #85 Aug/Sep 1969)

The story runs just 13 pages with not a panel wasted. The splash page is a gorgeous blend of Maggin's prose and Neal Adams' and Dick Giordano's artwork. Green Arrow and Queen stand back-to-back, looking subdued, unsure. Superimposed on their profile is a black child walking down tenement steps, an empty baby carriage in front of him and trashcans spewed with garbage to his left. The boy looks unconcerned, his face is confident.

Maggin's words define the scene: "Who are you, you who call yourself Green Arrow? What does a man do when his world is torn down around him, when he falls to the same injustices from which he has sought to protect others?" Twenty-five years after publication, the story of Oliver Queen's decision to run for mayor of Star City still resonates.

At least we had the opportunity to ask Maggin how his teacher graded such an obvious masterpiece. "I got a B+," he laughs today. "The professor thought I was going to draw the story, too. Maybe he wanted slick figures. I don't know."

Queen's run for mayor ended just two months later with the Superman and Green Arrow team-up story "World of Faceless Slaves," in *World's Finest* #210 (March 1972).

Though the wooden Dick Dillin/Joe Giella art doesn't help, the story's fundamental failure is its abrupt dismissal of the premise so beautifully presented in "What Can One Man Do?" Queen's single-panel decision not to run for mayor lays waste the earlier work's potential.

"World of Faceless Slaves" compares with the final chapters of Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* as a senseless repudiation of what came before. "I didn't like it either," Maggin remembers. "But I

don't think DC wanted to commit to a major sub-set of stories, for a long-term character on a lad with no reputation. I would have liked to run Ollie for mayor. It would have been fun."

Maggin wrote his first Superman script while still a student at Brandeis. "Must There Be A Superman?" appeared in *Superman* #247 (Jan. 1972). This time, the answer to an intriguing question title came to little effect. The story features a confused, but ultimately uncommitted, Superman, migrant Mexican farm workers, great Curt Swan/Murphy Anderson art, and not much else. The writer works too hard to send a message: "relevance" had passed.

1973 was the year Maggin hit his stride at DC. Now living in Manhattan, he put himself through graduate school at Columbia University writing for Superman and other Schwartz-edited titles. One of his first new assignments was a revival of the original Captain Marvel in *Shazam!*

"I read old Captain Marvel comics when I was a kid," the writer says. "My father and grandfather had a candy store in Brooklyn. Before I could read, I knew about Captain Marvel."

Though the short-lived revival carried mixed reviews, original artist C.C. Beck's work was thought overly cartoonish for 1970s comic book readers and the stories too silly. Maggin believes many fans continue to miss the point. "What we were doing it for was to see if we could pull off an entry-level superhero comic. Beck wanted to use his artwork with serious-type stories and it just wouldn't have worked. It would have been like bringing back



Splash page for Green Arrow back-up story for *Action Comics* #428. Art by Dick Giordano, script by Elliot S! Maggin. © DC Comics 1999



Superman #263 was part of Maggin's extended run on the Man of Steel. Cover? Who else? New Adams. © DC Comics 1999

character. He's our King Arthur, he's our Zeus. I just wish that the powers that control the character were as aware of his significance to the culture as the culture is. I tried to write stories that kept that in mind."

Icon or not, Maggin had the talent to make us appreciate Superman's human side. "You can't have a Superman story without Clark Kent," he says. Lois, Perry, Jimmy and Luther were given greater depth. Maggin even developed religions for his characters although he never explicitly used them in his stories.

"I give all my characters religions and give them demons. Clark Kent is Methodist, but Superman is Jewish," Maggin laughs. The real people behind the fictional characters?

"Cary (Bates) and I were buds. He wrote some great Superman stories..."

"Curt (Swan) and I made friends after we'd worked together for 15 years. You see, Cary and I had turned Superman into sort of a personal feldom as far as we were concerned, and whenever we had a conflict, we always came down on the same side of it," Maggin explains. "So Julie decided that Curt and I weren't going to be friends and he made that happen. Whenever something didn't like happened, Julie would blame Curt and when something that Curt didn't like happened, Julie would blame me, and he freely admit that that's what he was doing," Maggin laughs. "Years later, Curt and I had drinks together after a convention and for about four or five hours we sat in a cozy hotel bar in Nheca, New York and talked about Julie, politics, Superman, family and all sorts of stuff."

"My first few years of writing Superman, I worked pretty closely with Murphy Anderson. Curt would drop by the pages and leave, and Murphy would stay in the office. I would just hover over Murphy and watch him ink them. Al Milgram was his assistant then, so I'd hover over both of them."

And how about that famous exclamation point in the writer's by-line?

"By accident, I once put an exclamation point after my "S" on a script. Julie saw it and, without telling me, issued a general order that any mention of my name will hereby be punctuated with an exclamation point."

The Superman story "Wild Weekend in Washington" (#268 Oct. 1973) stands as an excellent example of the Maggin style. In the entertaining 14-page Batman sets Clark up on a blind date with Congresswoman Barbara (Batgirl) Gordon. Add a myotic orb, a nest full of spies and the story is off and running.

By the mid 70's, the writer's workload had expanded to other Schwartz edited titles including Batman, The Joker and Wonder Woman. Though not all of Maggin's many stories from this period are successful, most are well worth hunting down today. "The Cape & Cowl Deathtrap" (Detective Comics #458 Aug. 1975), in particular is an excellent Batman story that teams Maggin with Walter Simonson.

Maggin's first novel, *Last Son of Krypton*, was published in the flush of the first Superman movie in 1978. *Miracle Monday* aligned with the 1981 release of *Superman II*. Both books expand the writer's range with excellent results.

During the mid-80s Maggin left comic books for animation work and film projects. The recently published *Generation X* based on the Marvel series and *Kingdom Come* return him to superheroes. The later novel gives the writer closure with Green Arrow, Superman and Captain Marvel.

Kingdom Come was originally a DC mini-series published in

Wayne Boring to draw the Supermen of the 90s."

"The powers at DC saw very clearly that the audience was slowly shrinking and the trend was moving towards multi-episode stories, more involved plot lines and characterizations... and the new generation of readers just wasn't coming in. We were after the 7 to 12-year-olds. I was real excited at the idea of doing stories for real young kids. I felt like I was the last guy who wanted to write for kids. Everybody wanted to write for grownups. Everybody wanted to somehow make the medium grow up."

In 1973 Maggin returned to Green Arrow, writing a new back-up feature in Action Comics. In keeping with the lighter tone of the times, Maggin featured Queen and Dinah (Black Canary) Lance in a series of adventures that recall Nick and Nora Charles. And although Queen didn't become mayor, at least he finally found work, opening up his own public relations firm. Though no longer interested in the social issues of Green Lantern/Green Arrow, the series featured solid characters, well-written stories and just the right touch of humor. "Green Arrow was me when I was living in the city during graduate school. A lot of the things that happened to him happened to me first," Maggin says.

The Maggin style carried over to his work on Superman in the character's own title and in Action Comics. Maggin, alternating with Cary Bates, would script the Man of Steel's adventures for a record decade and a half.

Maggin's Superman stories were grounded by his respect for the character. "I always looked at Superman as an iconic figure, looked at him against the backdrop of other American mythology and I wanted, and still want, a hint of grandiose around the

1996. Produced by Mark Waid and Allen Ross, "Kingdom" details a fearsome alternate future for the heroes of the DC Universe. Waid chose Maggin to write a novel based on the work. Warner Books published *Kingdom Come* in March 1998.

"What I tried to do is write this defining back end of the legend," Maggin says. "So that if comic books are being written for the next 20 years, that's the direction they're going to. I'd like to see *Kingdom Come* become, to some extent, the end point of the mythology."

With *Kingdom Come*, one of our best has returned home. Elliot S! Maggin's website can be reached at <http://www.webaccess.com/elliott>. ☛

Didn't You used to Be Denny O'Neil?

Finding our favorite writer's work sometimes takes some research.

by Gary Zebner

Denny O'Neil began writing comics, for Marvel, in 1965. His tenure at Marvel included a couple of Patsy and Hedy and Millie The Model stories, an occasional Daredevil story and an exciting five issue run succeeding Stan Lee on *Dr. Strange in Strange Tales* (issues #145 to #149, June to October 1966). But by mid 1967, O'Neil's Marvel output had dwindled to occasional odd jobs and the young writer found work at Charlton Comics.

"I don't remember who told me that this guy from Darby, Conn., Dick Giordano, was in town once a week interviewing prospective writers and artists," O'Neil recalls. "So I went to see Dick—he would come in on a Thursday—they had a rented one-room office on Fifth Avenue somewhere. So I went up and saw him and came away with an assignment. I fell into a rhythm of going up there every Thursday morning and being given a job."

Perhaps out of a lack of confidence, or may be a desire to keep his work for the lesser of Marvel's competitors a secret, or as Denny has said, just from a "what-the-hell" attitude, his work at Charlton appears under the colorful pen name "Sergius O. Shagnessy."

O'Neil wrote a wide range of stories during his year and a half with Charlton including humor, western and superhero assignments. Usually restricted to back up and fill-in work, O'Neil's contributions included some fine "original" characters like *The Frankster* and *Wander*, as well as the unusual, well-remembered "Children of Doom."

"Children of Doom," which appeared in *Charlton Premiere* #2 (November 1967), captures much of Charlton's rambunctious late 60s spirit. The book length novel is an "end of the world" piece that gives an early example of O'Neil's ability to apply science fiction to further his own character driven, socially conscious, comic book style.

"One day Dick called me and said that something they had planned to publish in *Charlton Premiere*—at the last minute they discovered that they didn't have the rights to it so could I come up with something in two days? That became 'Children of Doom,' instant comic book," O'Neil laughs. "It didn't make any differ-

ence whether I met Pat Boyette and I succeeded or failed, what we had to do was get it done and that may have been a very liberating experience."

Even more interesting was O'Neil's first superhero creation *The Frankster* well illustrated by Jim Aparo. *The Frankster* made his sole appearance as a seven page back up in the final issue of *Peter Cannon, Thunderbolt* (#66 November 1967). *The Frankster* was an entertaining, Lord Byron quoting, anti-hero in training who "...uses mankind's most ancient weapons—wit, humor and courage—to combat overwhelming evil."

Wander was a quirky space cowboy who laid out his roll in the back pages of *The Cheyenne Kid* from issue #66 to #87. This time, O'Neil and Aparo's hero was a Native of the planet Sirius V who crash-landed in the old west. Though he looked like a cowboy, *Wander* spoke like Hamlet having learned English from an old book. The strip was a delightful juxtaposition of western and science fiction.

"We had no reason to believe anybody was even reading them," O'Neil says. "They were obscure cowboy books and backlogs in obscure cowboy books. So in a way they were a great learning experience. Anything you wanted to try was probably okay, as long as it wasn't obscure."

The following list was compiled by Gary Zebner, a fan who specializes in Charlton Comics. —the Eds.

Entries marked "copy not available" are best guesses or reconstructed from recent reprints. The stories are listed according to the credits on them, or best remembered by Steve Shatz as being written by O'Neil rather than himself.

ABORT AND COSTELLO #1 (February, 1968) Dick Giordano, editor
"Far Out Fairy Tales: Beauty and the Beast" Richard (Grass) Green, art (credited)
ABORT AND COSTELLO #2 (May, 1968) Dick Giordano, editor
"Far Out Fairy Tales: Beauty and the Beast" Richard (Grass) Green, art (credited)

BLUE THE KID #66 (May, 1968) Dick Giordano, editor
"Bounty Hunter" Pat Boyette, art (credited)
First installment of series about Kishan in the 19th century



BILLY THE KID #67 copy not available

"Bounty Hunter" Pat Boyette, art (not credited)

BILLY THE KID #68 (September 1968) Sal Gentile, editor

"Bounty Hunter" Pat Boyette, art (credited)

BILLY THE KID #69

"Bounty Hunter" Pat Boyette, art

Copy not available

BILLY THE KID #70

"Bounty Hunter" Pat Boyette, art

Copy not available

BILLY THE KID #71 (March, 1968) Sal Gentile, editor

"Bounty Hunter" Pat Boyette, art (credited)

Story about an ex-slave who sacrifices his life to save the main character

BILLY THE KID #72

"Bounty Hunter" Sanho Kim, art (credited)

Copy not available

CHARLTON PREMIERE #2 (November 1967) Dick Giordano, editor

"Children of Doom" Pat Boyette, art (credited)

The one Charlton comic every Dennis O'Neil fan must have

CHEYENNE KID #66 (May 1968) Dick Giordano, editor

"Wander" Jim Aparo, art (credited)

First installment of series

CHEYENNE KID #67 (July 1968) Sal Gentile, editor

"Wander: Medicine Man" Jim Aparo, art (credited)

CHEYENNE KID #68

"Wander" Jim Aparo, art

Copy not available

CHEYENNE KID #69 (November 1968) Sal Gentile, editor

"The Man From Sirius 5: Wander" Jim Aparo, art (credited)

CHEYENNE KID #70

"Wander" Jim Aparo, art

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CHEYENNE KID #71 (March, 1969) Sal Gentile, editor

"Wander: The Bad, the Worse, and the So-So" Jim Aparo, art (credited)

CHEYENNE KID #72 (May, 1969) Sal Gentile, editor

"The Stormy Saga of Wander" Fred Himes, art (credited)

HERCULES #5 (July, 1968) Sal Gentile, editor

"The Land of Amazons" Sam Glanzman, art (credited)

SPACE ADVENTURES 60(#1) (October, 1967) Dick Giordano, editor

"Healers From Nowhere" unknown (credited)

"The Plague" Pat Boyette, art

"The Secret of the Saucer" Jim Aparo, art

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SPACE ADVENTURES #2 (July 1968) Dick Giordano, editor

"The Quest Begins" Jim Aparo, art (credited)

"Race To the End of Time" Steve Ditko, art

"There Shall Be an Ending" Pat Boyette, art

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STRANGE SUSPENSE STORIES #4 (November, 1968) Sal Gentile, editor

"Nightmare Alley" Jim Aparo, art (credited by Skeates)

Peter Cannon—THUNDERBOLT #58 (July, 1967) Dick Giordano, editor

"The Sensational Sentinels: Into the Lair of the Mind-Bender" Sam Grainger, art (credited)

Peter Cannon—THUNDERBOLT #59 (September 1967) Dick Giordano, editor

"The Sensational Sentinels: Night of Doom" Sam Grainger, art (credited)

Peter Cannon—THUNDERBOLT #60 (November 1967) Dick Giordano, editor

"When Flies the Dragon" Pat Boyette, art (credited)

"The Frankster" Jim Aparo, art (credited)

TEXAS RANGERS IN ACTION #65 (March, 1968) Dick Giordano, editor

"The Man Called Loco" Pete Morisi, art (credited)

First installment of this series

TEXAS RANGERS IN ACTION #66

"The Man Called Loco" Pete Morisi, art

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TEXAS RANGERS IN ACTION #67

"The Man Called Loco" Pete Morisi, art

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TEXAS RANGERS IN ACTION #68 (October 1968) Sal Gentile, editor

"The Man Called Loco" Pete Morisi, art (uncredited)



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*Previous page: Cover of Peter Cannon—Thunderbolt #60 (an all Sergius issue!), art by Pat Boyette © DC Comics 1999
This page: cover of Peter Cannon—Thunderbolt #59, © DC Comics 1999*

From Fan to Pro and Back Again

Mark Evanier turned his boyhood hobby into a prolific career as a writer of many talents.

by Bob Sperry and Kevin Gilling

Mark Evanier can't remember his first comic book. "As I recall about four seconds after I was born, the doctor stepped me and dropped a copy of *Little Lulu* I'd been reading in the womb," he says today.

Born at the dawn of the Silver Age, Evanier has spent his life immersed in comic books. When he was a teenager in the 1960s, Evanier's passion for comics drove him off the bedroom floor away from his half-eaten apple and dog-eared copy of *Tales of Suspense* and straight to the heart of early fandom. Evanier made a name for himself as a prolific letter writer and fanzine contributor. He originated the legendary "Marvelite Rankings" and by the decade's end was running *Marvelmania*, Marvel's official fan club.

In the early 1970s Evanier assisted Jack Kirby on his Fourth World titles at DC and began his own comic writing career in 1972. His drive and talent soon took him from the bright colors and fast jokes of Gold Key's *Leoney Tunes* to the top tier of professional writers, leading his colleagues to privately wonder "what is that kid's secret?"

Evanier continues to be a highly visible figure in the world of comics. He has participated in every San Diego Comic-Con and his influential Point of View column runs weekly in the *Comic Buyer's Guide*. He is an encyclopedia of comic book history and a true advocate for the creative people behind the art form.

We spoke to Mark last November from his Los Angeles home. Our conversation focused on his important role in 1960s comic fandom as well as his professional comic book work at the early '70s. Evanier spoke with show biz brassiness befitting a local L.A. kid, and a warm, often self-deprecating, sense of humor.

"I was born in 1952," Evanier says. "And I just grew up in the extent grow up at all, reading comic books—read everything, could get my mitts on, comics included. My parents would buy me just about anything I wanted to read."

Evanier's early comic book collection consisted of lots of Gold Key and Harvey humor comics like *Uncle Scrooge* and *Achie McRich*. As a small child he would pile the books into a large box in his bedroom. He spent his time seated in the box pulling comic books up from underneath him and reading them. "Every so often I would get up and stir the box so that I would get the one's from the bottom to the top," he recalls today.

By his seventh birthday Evanier had discovered superhero comics. He well remembers his first, *Action Comics* #250—"two issues before Supergirl debuted. There was a Superman story called 'The Eye of Metropolis' and the back-up story was Tommy Tomorrow drawn by Jim Mooney who's become a good buddy of mine. The lead story was written by Bill Finger and drawn by Wayne Boring, neither of whom I ever really met. And there was a Censorilla story in there, too."

Soon Evanier traded in his humor comics to a second-hand bookstore for superhero titles. Needless to say, he has since spent a lot of time and money buying back the Carl Barks comics of his childhood.

Evanier embraced adventure-type comics across the board. He read AGC and Charlton comics in addition to the better-known DC and Marvel titles. When pressed, he admits a bias for DC Comics, particularly those edited by Julie Schwartz. Push him even further and he'll shyly confess that his all-time favorite comic title just might be a hold-over from his childhood, DC's *Fox and Crow*.

By his early teens, Evanier, no longer content with just reading comics, had become a letter column regular. "It was a very modest little way of connecting with the comic book business," he comments. "You have a letter printed and you suddenly feel you're a part of the month's *Spider-Man*."

Beginning with his first published missive in *Aquaman* #28 (August 1966), Evanier became an accomplished "letter hack." The practice of publishing full addresses, originated by Julie Schwartz in 1961 and soon copied by other editors, gave fans a way to contact each other. Evanier also began to receive fanzines, as amateur publishers took notice of his letter page contributions.

"I started corresponding with a lot of guys, one of whom was Tony Isabella. Then I started writing for fanzines and being involved in that," Evanier recalls.

"Mark and I probably started writing to each other while we were both members of a thing called the Yancy Street Gang, which used to put out a fanzine called *The Yancy Street Gazette*," Tony Isabella says today. "Mark was kind of the token DC fan of the *Gazette*, while I was a rabid Marvel fan. We just started exchanging letters and in a very short time we were both writing for every fanzine in sight."

If there were a hall of fame for LOC correspondents, Evanier's creation of the Hallowed Ranks of Marveldom would be reason enough for his induction alongside other 60s greats like Martin "Peezy" Peeple, Irene Varsanoff, and "Our Favorite Guy" H. Lillian O).

In 1967 in a letter featured in the June edition of *Stan's Soapbox*, Evanier created "The Hallowed Ranks of Marveldom." His brilliant suggestion of granting Marvel readers titles like "RFO (Most Frantic One)" and "QNS (Quite 'Nuff Sayer)" further closed ranks among this tight-knit group of fans. While leaving nobody behind (an RFO bought just one Marvel comic per month), the rankings gave more seasoned fans something to shoot for (a QNS, for example, must have had at least one letter published). Slightly abridged versions of Evanier's titles were carried on Marvel letter pages well into the early '70s.

Also in 1967 Evanier's local fan friendships coalesced into a bona fide organization: The Los Angeles Comic Book Club. The club was a free-wheeling group of about 30 members who met every Saturday at a West Los Angeles community center to talk and trade comics. "The Comic Club is where my interest in comics really kicked in," Evanier says. "It was fun to be around people who could talk about who the best inker for Jack Kirby was."

The club's strictest rule was that the members were not allowed to discuss who started the club. "About eight different guys had their version of how they started the club, and fistfights could erupt," Evanier recalls with laughter. "At the first organiza-

sional meeting, I was the only one present who wasn't claiming that honor, so they made me president. Also, I'd had all those letters printed, and I guess they thought that meant I outranked a fan who didn't turn up often in Flash-Grams."

Fellow comic club member Steve Sherman recalls the roots of West Coast comic fandom: "It really got started because of the *Batman* TV show," Sherman says. "Then they did a television special on a local channel here with Gary Owens. Owens showed some clips from old serials, and then he went and showed some of the comic book shops that used to be on Hollywood Boulevard." Suddenly kids who read comics began to search out other local fans. The camaraderie of the club helped to bridge the distance between the New York publishers and these West Coast fans.

"Being on the West Coast, we were so far removed from the comic book business, it was like studying Saturn. None of us thought we'd ever touch the business, let alone work in it," adds Evanier. He remembers receiving a letter from Steve Ditko that was loudly dismissed as a forgery by other club members. "The general reaction was like 'was claiming a fictional character had sent me a Candygram. It seemed outside the realm of human possibility that one could actually get a letter from Steve Ditko.'"

The L.A. Comic Club faded from the scene in 1969 as Evanier and his fellow members went to work for Marvel Comics' official fan club: Marvelmania International. A Los Angeles businessman who had sold Marvel on the idea of a West Coast based successor to the Merry Marvel Marching Society conceived the organization.

The always-energetic Evanier was the first to hear about Marvelmania. "He went over there and talked to the guy who was setting it up," Sherman remembers. "The guy knew nothing about comic books, and Mark knew everything. So then Mark came back to the club and told us 'hey, Marvelmania is, like, down the street.'"

"When Marvelmania was getting started the fellow who ran the place hired me to edit the club magazine and Steve Sherman as production supervisor," Evanier recalls.

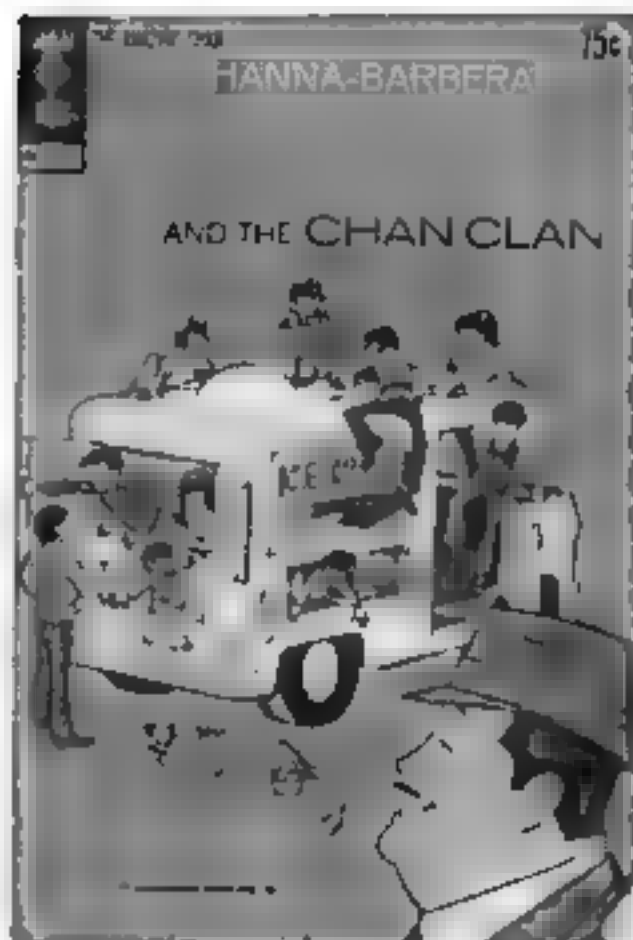
"I think it was a question that he didn't know much about Marvel Comics and I walked in the door one day and I did. He needed somebody in the building that could tell the difference between Dr. Strange and Dr. Doom. And, I had created the Rankin of Marvelism!"

Soon Stan Lee himself was chatting up Evanier and Sherman as a "couple of young, zingy, with-it guys" in an item in *Marvel Bulpen Bulletins*. Actually, their Marvelmania jobs sounded more glamorous than they actually were.

Operating out of a West Los Angeles storefront, Evanier and Sherman worked hard at editorial and production chores. The other club members' duties included rolling Jack Kirby superhero posters, and shipping out decals, catalogs, and other Marvel merchandise.

Unfortunately, the businessman soon disappeared with company funds, and by late 1970 Marvelmania was dead. Evanier and Sherman quit the organization long before the theft because they had come to realize that their boss could not be trusted. Prior to the crime, the pair alerted Marvel and everyone they knew who was doing business with him, of their suspicions.

With Jack Kirby's move to Southern California in early 1969 the West Coast at last became home to a major East Coast comic book professional. As might be expected, Evanier was quick to make contact with Kirby. Their relationship expanded with



Mark's American comic book debut: *The Amazing Chan and the Chan Clan*. © Hanna-Barbera Productions, Inc. 1969

Evanier's involvement at Marvelmania

Kirby's frustration with his situation at Marvel has been well documented. Suffice to say that by the summer of 1970 he had decided to leave the company he helped create and move to DC. Kirby asked Evanier and Sherman to come with him as his assistants.

Kirby set up shop at his Thousand Oaks home and quickly went to work creating some of the most important comic books of all-time: his immortal Fourth World series of *Jimmy Olsen*, *Forever People*, *New Gods* and *Mister Miracle*. Evanier and Sherman handled the letter pages for the King's three new titles, and served as youthful sounding boards for his ideas.

In addition to the substantial creative experience, Jack and his wife Roz became something of a second family for the two young men. Evanier and the Kirby's friendship only deepened over the years.

Another product of Evanier's association with Jack Kirby has been his involvement with the San Diego ComicCon.

Shel Dorf, the convention's founder, recalls a summer evening at Jack Kirby's home in 1969. Dorf had come to Kirby to pitch the idea of a West Coast comic convention. Kirby told Dorf that there was one guy he had to meet, "a real go-getter named Mark Evanier." Evanier played an important part in drawing Los Angeles fans to the early San Diego conventions, and has gone on to become a popular panel moderator and speaker.

"There are so many interesting people at the San Diego Convention," Evanier comments. "One of the things I find fascinating about it is that the hall is filled with people who, though

they might not be Guests of Honor or celebrities, represent important facets of comic book history. You never know when an important, perhaps unheralded name, will leap right off a name badge at you."

Evans has attended every single San Diego convention. Perhaps that is because he so effortlessly combines the spirit of a fan with the skill of a professional.

By late 1972 *Forever People* and *New Gods* had been

cancelled, and Kirby had been taken off *Jimmy Olsen*. Only *Mister Miracle* remained and largely without the grand trappings of the Fourth World saga. Though certainly more than adequate, Kirby's replacement titles *Kamandi* and *The Demon* lacked the grandeur of the earlier work. For Evans it was time to move on.

In 1971 Mike Royer recommended Evans for a job writing Disney comics for foreign distribution. A year later Evans's prolific output and Disney connection landed him a job with Gold Key Comics. The writer had returned to the humor books of his childhood. "I was writing six or eight comics a month for Gold Key. *Bugs Bunny*, *Daffy Duck*, *Porky Pig*, the *Road Runner*, *Looney Tunes*, *Woody Woodpecker*, *Scooby-Doo*. It was a good training ground. I enjoyed doing those tremendously."

By the mid 1970s Evans had begun to actively pursue writing assignments outside of comics.

He started hanging around the Comedy Store in Hollywood and writing material for standup comedians. Evans's love of comedy was another of his boyhood passions. Shel Dorf remembers being amazed by the number of books on classic comedians the 17-year-old fan had on his shelf. Steve Sherman recalls watching *The Tonight Show* with Mark usually beating Johnny Carson to the punch line.

In 1976 Evans began the all-consuming task of writing and story editing the popular *Welpome Back*, *Kotter* television show. Since then he has written for a number of live action TV shows including *That's Incredible*, *The Richard Pryor Show* and *The Love Boat*. Other television credits include situation comedies for McLean Stevenson, Bob Newhart and Nancy Walker.

For seven seasons, beginning in 1987 Evans was the chief writer and voice director for the highly successful *Garfield and Friends* animated series. He has been writing for cartoon shows since 1978, including a couple of episodes of Fox's animated *Superman* show, and has just completed writing, editing and voice directing *Channer Umpire 3* for the Kids WB Network.

Often lost among his better-known writing assignments are Evans's extensive post-70s comic book credentials.

In 1982 Evans stepped into the spotlight with his now mature comic scripting. He wrote, and later edited, a revival of

DC's *Blackhawk* with veteran artist Dan Speigle. Though published under duress by DC (Steven Spielberg held the movie rights and DC wanted to keep potential merchandising opportunities open) Evans's *Blackhawk* excited fans. Evans and Speigle captured the original excitement of DC's Silver Age war books at the exact moment war comics were dying out.

When comics exploded with the rise of the independents in the 1980s, Evans was there as well, contributing two of the best

titles of the decade: *DNAgents* and its exciting spin-off, *Crossfire*, for Eclipse Comics. *DNAgents* is special to Mark as it was his first comic book creation, a feat which had impressed his old friend Jack Kirby. Evans considers *Crossfire*, the tales of a private detective who assumes the secret identity of a murdered assassin, to be perhaps the highlight of his comic scripting. "Go dig out the first twenty or so issues of *Crossfire*, if you don't like those, you won't like anything else I've ever written," he says today.

Like Evans himself, *Crossfire* made his living on Los Angeles' westside. The westside also provided the setting for the interesting but ill-fated *Hollywood Superstars* published by Marvel in their Epic line. Part detective comic, part romance comic, the short-lived series told tales of Hollywood as only an insider like Evans could.

Beginning in 1984, Evans has also scripted over 130 stories for Sergio Aragones' *Groo the Wanderer*. Originally drawn by Aragones using a pantomime storytelling technique, Evans has added his renowned verbal wit to the humorous tales of the bumbling swordsman.



It's *Crossfire* with Mark Evans's favorite car! Cover to *Crossfire* #16, art by Brent Anderson. © Mark Evans. (inside story and art is © Evans and Dan Speigle.)

Evans's work on *Groo* has also been a reflection of his advocacy on behalf of comic book creators. *Groo* originally appeared in *Destroyer Duck* #1, a benefit comic produced to support Steve Gerber's lawsuit with Marvel over *Howard the Duck*. Evans was invited aboard by Aragones to "be funny verbally the way Aragones is funny visually," and to handle the editorial end of publishing a regular *Groo* comic. From the beginning, Aragones and Evans have maintained complete editorial control, regardless of the publisher.

In contrast to television, Evans enjoys the intimate relationship to the finished product that comics provide. "Of all the things I fool people into letting me write, I enjoy comic books the most," he maintains. "When you write a TV show, you have a couple hundred people between you and the audience. When we do an issue of *Groo*, it's just Sergio, Stan (Sakai), Tom (Luth) and me."

Evans is of course visible to comic book fans every week with his *Point of View* column in *Comic Buyer's Guide*. Whether the subject is Stan Laurel or Stan Lee, he is always an enjoyable

read. Though the column covers a wide variety of subjects, he is at his best when discussing comic book history.

Though Jack Kirby died in 1994, Evanier continues to champion his legacy. Mark is currently writing what he hopes will be the definitive biography of Jack. DC has just recently published a Jimmy Olsen story written by Evanier and drawn by Steve Rude in *Legends of the DC Universe* #14. The story is based on a Jack Kirby idea from the early '70s. "It's a left over plot that Jack had. He and I plotted an issue of Jimmy Olsen together, and DC vetoed the storyline for reasons that I really cannot explain. A year or so ago I was going through some of my old files, and I found my notes for this plot that we never did. I thought to myself 'Hey, this is a good story,' and I called up Steve Rude. I said 'I've got an old Jack Kirby plot here that I wanna do, and Steve said 'if you do it with anyone but me, I'll kill you.'"

Evanier is also currently collaborating with Sergio Aragones on *Fanboy*, a six issue mini series from DC. This hilarious spoof of fandom is recommended for all.

He remains involved and continues to correspond with comic book oriented publications - all in an effort to keep the record straight, or just talk about comics. Mark is the guy who'll clarify that while *Fantastic Four* #6 was mainly inked by Dick Ayers, a few panels were also inked by Joe Sinnott.

"Mark is still a fan," Steve Sherman says. "He still loves to read and talk about comics. He's a really nice guy who's always been there whenever anybody needed help or had a question."

Mark Evanier turned his hobby into a career, but never lost the hobby. ●

(A slightly abridged version of this article appears in *Comic Book Marketplace* #67, March 1999. CBM is an excellent magazine from Gary & Lisa Carter and Gemstone Publishing. For more information visit their website at www.gemstonepub.com - asst. Ed.)



Steve Rude's cover for *Legends of the DC Universe* #14 "The American Evolution". © DC Comics 1999.



Sergio's visual humor and Mark's verbal wit, from *Marvel's Epic Comics Groo* #120. Groo © Sergio Aragones 1999.



I get my comics at Ralph's and you should too! Ralph and Mike are knowledgeable, helpful and have a GREAT selection of Silver Age books. Contact them on the web at www.ralphscomiccorner.com

Az Good Az it Gets

by **Gordon Hope-Murray**

(Denny O'Neil and artist Joe Quesada created the character Azrael in late 1992. The creation of Azrael was a key element in the epic Knightfall story arc, which involved the whole Batman family of books for more than 20 months beginning in 1993.

Azrael, or Jean-Paul Valley, is a confused young man unknowingly subject to subconscious training as an assassin since his conception by a strange and powerful organization founded in the Middle Ages by a self-proclaimed saint named Dumas.

Jean-Paul was chosen by the injured Bruce Wayne to don the mantle of Batman during Wayne's convalescence. Unfortunately, Jean-Paul was unable to overcome the twisted sense of justice implanted in his psyche by the Order of St. Dumas. Upon recovery, Bruce Wayne reclaimed the mantle of the Bat from the increasingly violent Azrael, but has since kept a constant watch on Jean-Paul Valley, anxious to assist the perplexed young man when necessary.

Azrael has been Denny's regular monthly writing assignment since 1995.

Gordon Hope-Murray maintains a web page devoted to the Azrael character. What follows are Gordon's description, review and opinion of the first regular monthly book, Azrael #1, and the latest, Azrael #50. Gordon's web page, Agent of the Bat, can be found at <http://members.tripod.com/AgentoftheBat>. - asst. Ed.)

Azrael: "Fallen Angel: 1 - "Some Say in Fire..."

Azrael #1, February 1995

Writer: Dennis O'Neil

Penciller: Barry Kitson

Inker: James Pascoe

Colorist: Demetrius Bassoukos

Separations: None Credited

Letterer: Ken Bruzenak

Assistant Editor: Chuck Kim

Editor: Archie Goodwin

Synopsis:

A Demon Batman that resembles Bli's demands shoes from a Batman that resembles Azrael. The fiery combat that ensues is a hallucination and when it clears Jean-Paul Valley is standing over a hoodlum who had tried to rob him. Jean-Paul meets a man named Brian Bryan, a former psychiatrist, who walks him to the homeless shelter where Jean-Paul is staying. The hoodlum Jean-Paul has just beaten up meets with his friends and they



This page: Cover of Azrael #1. © DC Comics 1999. Next page: Cover of Azrael #50, art by Roger Robinson, James Pascoe and Demetrius Bassoukos. © DC Comics 1999.

decide to exact revenge for the injustice done to them. Having decided on their course of action, the hoodlums head for Brian's pile of cardboard boxes and attack Brian.

Batman reveals to Robin that he feels a certain responsibility for Jean-Paul's situation and sets off to give him something. Meanwhile, a contest is being fought somewhere to determine the next Azrael.

Jean-Paul rescues Brian from the thugs before returning to the shelter, but the hoodlums who tried to attack Brian decide to set fire to the mission where Jean-Paul is staying. As everyone around him escapes, Jean-Paul remains seated on his bunk reminding himself that if he sees something that should not be there he should ignore it.

Review:

The introduction has an incredible power. It induces a strong sense of Jean-Paul's hallucination in the reader. Rather than the artwork, Denny's dialogue is the key to this. The off-kilter banter between Azrael and the Bat-Demon beautifully renders the hallucinatory effect. The off-kilter dialogue includes such gems as "wet tissue metaphors" and "pistachio ice cream melting in a toaster oven"; banter of this type is not often found in comics.

The treatment of the hoodlums also is a point of interest. It is sideways swipe at society's general tendency towards an "I'm-the-victim-no-matter-what" mentality with a subtle touch of humor. When contemplating the two beatings he's received at the hands of Jean-Paul that day, one hoodlum points to his blackened eye and says "I only told him I was gonna cut him and he did this to me." In fact, he decides it's because Jean-Paul cheated that he was beaten and that the only way to stop him cheating is to set fire to his home.

The art is reminiscent of the art in Sword of Azrael and the coloring is magnificent. The detail is incredible, look at the lenses of Jean-Paul's glasses and you will see finely detailed flames. James Pascoe's inks, in particular, remind me of Kevin Knowlan's work on Sword of Azrael; finely detailed lines adding fullness where it's needed without adding unnecessary complication.

The gag ending, while providing a couple of chuckles also provide a window into Jean-Paul's shattered mind, proclaiming this will be no ordinary superhero title. How many superhero titles have no Supervillains or costumes in their first issue?

Rant:

Without a doubt this is a fine piece of writing. If Denny can keep this level of writing up, he'll have a top 30 book in no time. Denny is also starting with what is pretty much a clean slate. He can take any direction from here; the homeless concept has great potential and could be exploited well at the hands of such a talented writer.

Azrael "Resurrection"

Azrael #50, March 1999

Writer: Dennis O'Neil

Penciller: Roger Robinson

Inker: James Pascoe

Colorist: Demetrius Bassoukos

Separations: Prismacolor

Letterer: Ken Bruzenak

Assistant Editor: Frank Berrios

Editor: Mike Carlin

Synopsis:

Batman charges Azrael with tracking down Nick Scratch and gives Jean-Paul a new costume. Azrael starts with Scratch's old partner, the man who helped develop Scratch's devil-faced goons. When Azrael meets the doctor in a bar wearing his old costume, a group of local red necks recognize him and attack him. He swiftly defeats the drunks but is then knocked out by scratch's henchmen and the house he is in is set on fire. When he wakes up he escapes from his costume and rescues the people in the house while his costume burns. Changing into his new costume he proceeds to pursue the doctor and Nick Scratch's henchmen.

Review:

The writing at times seems inconsistent. Captions switch between first and third person instead of the more unique and interesting second person that has become customary in Azrael. The introduction almost seems to indicate that Nick Scratch will be Azrael's major quest for the next year, creating a Fallen Angel type arc that may be what is needed to generate long-term interest in the title. The writing on the whole is a bit of mishmash

and not up to par with the majority of recent stories.

The art is less well finished than last issue. The coloring features more embellishment, and adds visual interest to the highly detailed backgrounds. But the figures themselves don't seem too well served by the backgrounds. Robinson's use of perspective is more understated here than previously, but he still makes sure to draw the reader's eye to the background.

Rank:

There is a blaring outcry against the new costume, and I have to agree. Not because it sucks or because it's not as good as the old one, but because it's bound to convince non readers that Azrael is nothing but a gimmick and that is going to hurt sales in the long term. The costume isn't great, but it's not as bad as it could be (just think, we could have got a Byrne revamp or a Liefeld revamp. I can just see JP now, with a Steel G-string and D cups finally figuring out that the three missing months before No Man's Land were for plastic surgery. Liefeld would say in his defense "With that hair he looks just like a woman from behind").

Seriously though, this issue didn't seem to reflect the kind of craft that went into some of the more recent issues. The writing was a bit of a let down, and I've got to ask when Azrael and Oracle are going to at least try to get it on because I really want to see it happen.

Also, it's hard to believe that Azrael's costume was destroyed. I know the properties of Kevlar and it A.) doesn't burn, and B.) doesn't tear (that's why professional motorbike racers use it to pad the knees). So I can only assume that the costume will be back, hopefully when Azrael reveals Nick Scratch as the killer of the senator. ●



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